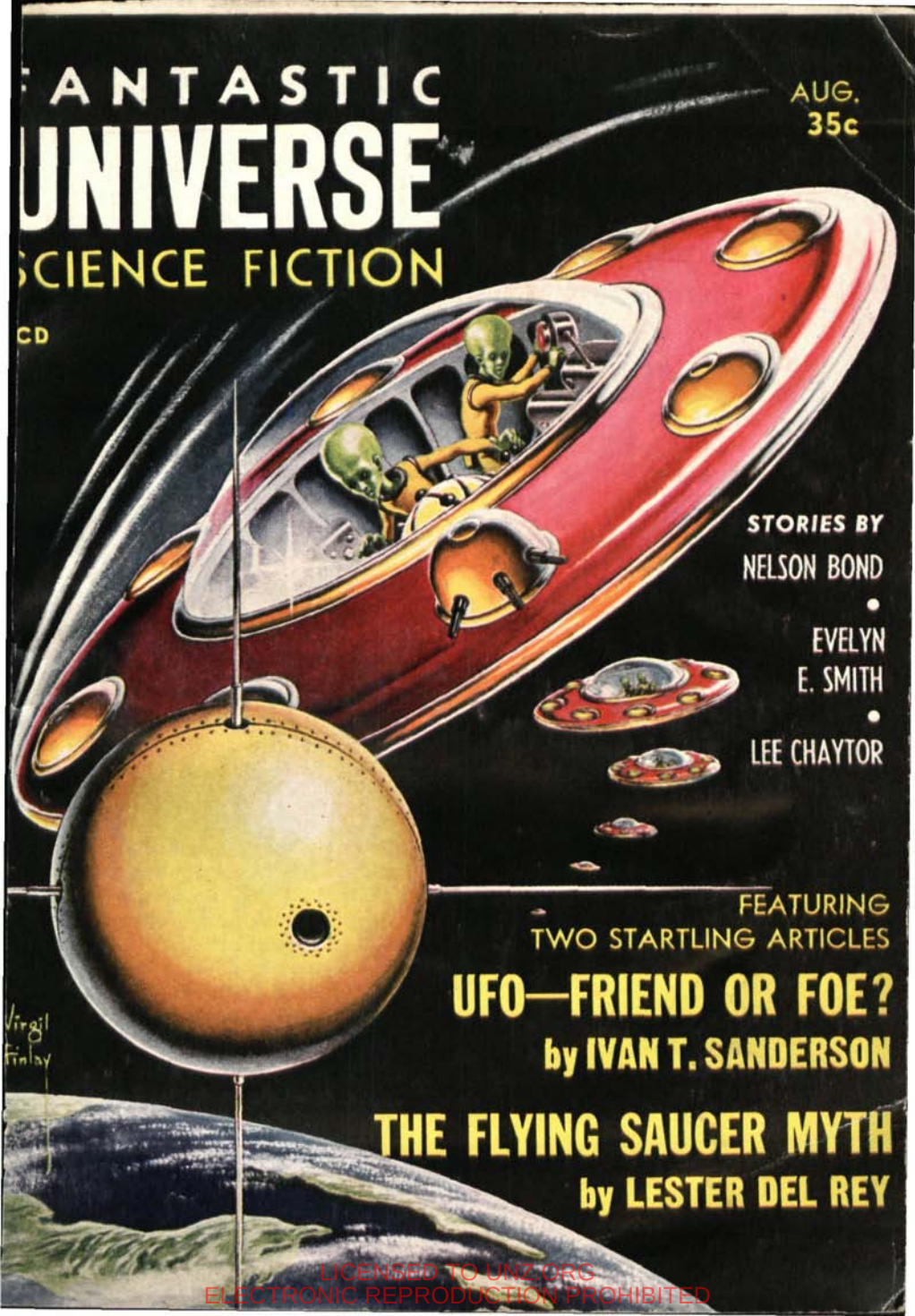

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"FLYING SAUCERS ATTACK MAN-MADE SATELLITE!"

COULD THIS BE THE HEADLINE OF A 1965 NEWSPAPER?

Fantastic? — perhaps!... could our forefathers possibly anticipate that we'd be able to cross this Continent in a matter of hours?... Could they even conceive of the possible launching of a man-made satellite?.

Then why should the prospect of an attack by a Flying Saucer be so fantastic, especially upon a scientific object floating in space?

Flying Saucers—or, rather, Unidentified Flying Objects—are today very much a part of our times. Reports on sightings are no longer relegated to the back pages. Too many hard-headed and able men, in and outside of government, here and abroad, such as Admiral Delmer S. Fahrney and General Albert C. Wedemeyer, are agreed that objects are coming into our atmosphere at high speeds which defy facile dismissal and that *there is no aircraft on earth that can at will so handily outdistance our latest jets!*

This makes Flying Saucers of immediate interest to the American people from our viewpoint, and this is why we are again featuring, as a public service, more articles on this question which concerns *you, the reader!* What are these shapes in the sky? Are they friend or foe? Are they a potential menace? And who are these people who are supposed to have landed from the Saucers? Genuine extra-terrestials—or foreign agents?

Let's make one thing clear, though. We have no axe to grind. We are not trying to sell you on the superior virtue of life on Alpha Centauri, and we are *not* trying to convert you on the subject of Flying Saucers! We are simply trying to put together a magazine that reflects *your* interest in the world around you,—and in carrying regular articles on UFO sightings prepared specially for Fantastic Universe by Civilian Saucer Intelligence of New York and other authorities on the subject,—our intent is just that—and no more!

Lester del Rey and Ivan T. Sanderson have gone deeply into the subject in this issue, taking opposite views. You can now peruse the pros and cons, and explore with these important writers the startling possibilities of the subject, all in a single magazine.

THE EDITORS

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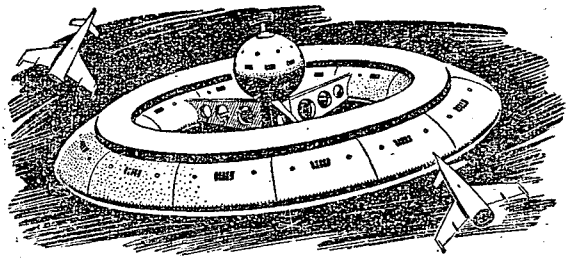

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FANTASTIC UNIVERSE, Vol. 8, No. 2. Published monthly by King-Size Publications, Inc., 320 Fifth Ave., N. Y. 1, N. Y. Subscription, 12 issues $3.75, single copies 35c. Foreign postage extra. Reentered as second-class matter at the post office, New York, N. Y. Additional entry, Holyoke, Mass. The characters in this magazine are entirely fictitious and have no relation to any persons living or dead. Copyright, 1957, by King-Size Publications, Inc. All rights reserved, August, 1957. Printed in U. S. A.

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GABRIEL HEATTER reports on dramatic new invention that triumphs over hearing loss and hides deafness as never before

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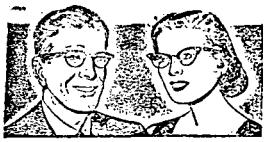
by Gabriel Heatter Internationally Famous Commentator heard nightly over MBS network



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ufo-friend or foe

by IVAN T. SANDERSON

What are these so-called "Flying Saucers" or UFO? Unknown life-forms? Or alien-controlled machines?

WE ARE assuming, since the official pronouncement of Rear Admiral Delmer S. Fahrney, released at the time of the organization of NICAP—the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena—and the appearance of the name of General Albert C. Wedemeyer on the prospectus of that organization, that there are UFOS, in point of fact, and that, at long last, intelligent men of standing and even working scientists are prepared to investigate them.

Thus, after a long, hard fight, reason has triumphed over scepticism and the science of Ufology has been established. Now it has to be accepted.

Before this happens, though, we are going to have many trials and tribulations. Every new science has today and for the past thousand years.

And there are danger signals out already. One of them is a veritable storm warning.

This is a strong indication that what may be called "Reader's-Digestism" is almost universal among serious-

Ivan T. Sanderson writes about the recently reported visitors from Outer Space in the present article—the second of three being written specially for this magazine by the noted scientist and Ufologist, author of the recently published MONKEY KINGDOM (Hanover House), and HOW TO KNOW THE AMERICAN MAMMALS (New American Library).

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minded Ufologists: that is, they seem to believe that all things can be given simple tags. A good example of this fallacy is the notion that there is an animal called "The Whale". Actually, there are more than one hundred and fifty entirely different kinds of whales alive today, varying in size when full grown, from seven feet to 113 feet in length, and showing a very wide range of physical features and behaviour.

There has long been a tendency among many who are interested in the subject of Ufology, to assume that the objects are all either identical, of one kind or, at least, of one class. This is a most dangerous concept but one that has, nonetheless, already shown up in the statement of intentions of NICAP. Admiral Fahrney in his first press release stated that "There are signs that an intelligence directs these objects because of the way they fly" and that "Reliable reports indicate that there are objects coming into our atmosphere at very high speeds". This may, indeed, be true, but it appears to represent only a minor aspect of the whole problem of UFOS.

UFOS are possibly and probably as various as, say, means of transport, and, in view of this possibility, they should be classified. To this end we may set up four major categories. These are:-

(1) As yet unexplained natural phenomena of a physical nature, but not *alive*.

(2) As yet unsuspected Life-Forms, feeding on pure energy, and indigenous to our own (and possibly other) atmospheres, and/or to Space itself.

(3) Constructions (machines) built on other of our own Solar System's planets or on planet's of other stars, controlled by intelligence.

(4) Aerial machines constructed on this Earth by our own race, that may be considerably in advance of our best aircraft up to now shown to the public.

From the vast accumulation of UFO sightings, reaching back to early classical and even to ancient times and now pouring in daily from all over the world, *all* these four types at least, seem to exist. Moreover, there is evidence that there may be several other categories as well. Let us, however, take these first four basic types, one at a time.

Category number one is the least offensive, the easiest to comprehend, and the easiest to "explain away or "wipe" —a pertinent expression originally coined by that elegant master of tomfoolery but most agile of all open minds, Charles Fort. "Explaining away" has regret-

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tably become a stock-in-trade of established, entrenched, or orthodox Science when dealing with anything that it does not understand, which is not in its textbooks, or which might cause the individual scientist professional or financial embarassment. If ten thousand honest citizens say they see a glowing blue-green globe manoevering round low hills, somebody has to be set up as an "expert" to explain the phenomenon, otherwise a "panic" may ensue—though the public is often enormously solid about most such matters, and Science—the Holy Cow—will lose face. The Press therefore picks some poor benighted, overworked, and usually underpaid scientist in some hallowed institution and demands from him an explanation. Almost invariably he gives one, and often the first one that comes into his head, in pure desperation. Usually this is peurile; sometimes it is as fantastic as the original report. Professor Menzel of Harvard and his hot air is an example. Though I cannot say whether this learned gentleman is underpaid, I am sure he is overworked, and he is certainly not an expert in the field of Ufology, despite his standing as a Meteorologist.

There are lots of funny things in our sky and many others that "legitimately" fall from it—bolides, meteorites, tactites, and now even blocks of angular ice and live fish. The ice can, of course, be explained away by refrigerators in airplanes even if none are flying above, but fish are less pleasant. However, one load has now landed on a "professional" (which means working for a recognized scientific establishment) ichthyologist, so it cannot be denied. There are auroras, and explosions in the sky, and other aberrations, so that even the radio technicians state there must be things going on up there which are quite "decent" but which we have not yet pinned down and explained. Quite a large percentage of alleged UFO sightings may indeed be perfectly natural, non-animate phenomena.

Messrs. Harold Urey, Harrison Brown, and other scientists who studied meteors and meteorites after the conclusion of their stint with the Manhattan Project—and as a counter to its horrors—came up with the idea that one of our Sun's planets blew up, or blew itself up, some time ago, giving rise to the asteroid belt and a lot of junk that still meanders into our atmosphere to this day. Goodness only knows of what this junk may consist, but it certainly includes bits of sedimentary rocks—and, perhaps even of statuary? Then, there could be all sorts of remnants of other "heavenly" bodies of long ago, streaming across our space-time continuum,

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which we might run into or overtake. The limits of as-yet-undescribed but purely that could drift in here are almost without bounds.

Our second category of possible UFOS presents quite another set of problems. This is something that the Airforce admits it once considered, though it seems finally to have abandoned the idea. It is, simply, that some UFOS may themselves be alive. This is to say, they may be a Life-Form, equivalent to but not specifically either Animal, Vegetable, or Virus, that may dwell in the upper atmosphere of this or all planets or live in space itself.

This theory was, as far as I can ascertain, first put forward in a Berlin magazine by the Countess Zoe-Wassilko-Serecki—now resident in Austria and well known in (rather surprisingly) astrological circles—though Charles Fort, of course, mooted the idea some forty years ago.

As mentioned above, it was apparently considered by the Airforce investigators but was abandoned for no clearly stated reasons.

However, there was a comment in the Blue Book report issued by that body to the effect that, in addition to sundry fairly sensible ideas, some that were considered to be slightly balmy had also been taken into consideration and rejected.

The "life-form" theory was one of these. In substance it goes as follows.

Some, and in fact quite a high percentage of UFO reports contain a number of statements as to the *behaviour* of the objects and this can only be likened to that of animals or other mobile living things. They dance; they play tag; they even appear to breed (by joining in pairs and giving rise to a lot of little ones, plus a blinding flash of light); they are highly inquisitive but they try to keep out of harm's way; yet, if cornered, they fight back apparently with bolts of pure energy. They are also either awfully stupid or of a "low order" of intelligence, like the lower animals. As a result of such considerations, Miss Wassilko-Serecki pondered the possibility of these types of UFOS being "animals" or some other life-form, and in doing so she struck upon a most significant point.

We all know that animals feed almost exclusively, if not entirely so, on matter. Plants on the other hand feed partly on energy, *via* sunlight, and partly on matter in the form of the air they breathe and the liquids they absorb through their roots (or, in the case of many aquatic plants, their cuticle). At the same time, the viruses—which are mostly parasites or saprophytes, and thus feed on matter—can, in some

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cases (*vide*, the bacteriophages) at one time be crystalline and thus inanimate, and at another time colloidal and animate, or alive. Considering these facts, Countess Wassilko-Serecki postulated the existence of life-forms that feed on pure energy and which are mostly composed of energy, though concentrated around a core or body of highly tenuous matter. Where, she asked, could and would such creatures be most likely to dwell?

The obvious and perhaps the only answer is at the outer limits of our atmosphere or beyond it, in space itself, where some matter exists, though in minute quantities, and where enormous supplies of raw energy are available in many forms—photons, cosmic rays, and so forth.

She then further developed this theory by considering the size of living things in a liquid medium—*i. e.* the seas and oceans—and came up with the true observation that the largest animals therein live at the surface, the smaller at the bottom, or to put it another way, all large ones, that we know of, live near the top while only very small ones appear to be able to dwell at the bottom. This does not exclude very large ones—like the Sperm Whale—from diving to the bottom for a time; nor does it exclude the occurence of minute ones at the surface. Then another thing, animals that burrow in the ground move very slowly; animals at the bottom of the oceans move faster; those at its surface faster still; whereas things in the air move fastest of all. On the surface of the land, the Cheetah can top seventy miles an hour; in the air a kind of bird—the Giant Swift of the Middle East—has been paced by a plane flying at over one hundred and fifty miles an hour. In fact, the higher up one goes and the less dense the medium becomes, the larger the life-forms therein to be able to grow and the faster they can move.

By the current fad called extrapolation, moreover, it can be demonstrated within very fair limits that life forms living in the upper atmosphere at various altitudes should, in fact, be of just the sizes and be able to move at just the speeds that UFOS seen at those levels have been reported to be and to be able to travel. Even the half-mile long jobs that have been reported to travel at some 19,000 miles an hour—which have caused so much merriment—are not by any means impossible and may, in fact, be quite probable.

Two questions are invariably asked at this point. First, why aren't these creatures seen all the time and, conversely, since they are not, why are they seen sometimes? The answers are quite simple. To the first question, let it

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be said that they normally live so far up (even beyond our atmosphere) that they are not visible to the naked eye especially through the scatter-effect of our dust-laden atmosphere. At the same time, telescopes are focused either on planes and other objects well *within* our atmospheric envelope or, at night, far *beyond* it, on heavenly bodies. You can even shove a four-engined bomber up so high you can't see it. The answer to the second question is much more pertinent.

If you map all the "reports" of UFOS and especially of this type, both reliable and vague, you will find that there are heavy concentrations in certain countries and around certain spots in those countries. Further, these "reports" string out between these spots along thin, straight lines. The spots are almost invarjably areas where there is a high concentration of Power manufacture—hydro—electric plants, atomic energy installations, or even powerful radio and TV outlets. The tenuous lines connecting them can be very well matched by the radio beams for guiding aircraft. Why should such sightings form this network on the map? Miss Wassilko-Serecki has a good answer to this also.

If these life-forms that dwell in the upper atmosphere feed on pure energy, and if they occasionally—perhaps because of wounds, old age, "sickness", or such—do drift down into the lower levels of our atmospheric sea, to what would they most likely be attracted? Naturally, to sources of their food—i. e. to sources of freely radiated energy. Moreover, in the olden days, there was little of this available on the surface of this earth for them to "feed" on, so they seldom bothered to come down. Today, humans are spouting untold quanta of energy into the air: a sort of free-lunch counter for the creatures. They are, in fact, beginning to deep-dive to get a free meal: Whacky; incredible? Probably, but none the less possible.

Those who accept the possibility of this theory usually want to know if its originator has conceived anything of the construction of these creatures. She has, and her ideas are not without reason. They could be vast, virtually empty—except for their entrapped energy—bladders of tenuous matter, and particularly of silicones in a special form, that would automatically adopt spherical (when stationary) or pear-, spindle-lenticular-, hexagonal-, kite-, tetrahedral-, or other forms that are almost automatic in a liquid or gaseous medium or in space, and which can be seen under any microscope focussed on the tiny life-forms found in almost any water. As they move, their

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form should change, since they are, from our point of view, nothing but vast jelly-like masses. Those of a spherical type could become pear-shaped at low speeds in a dense medium, or a spindle at high speed in highly rarified air. Further, they could, being pure energy, glow at night, and due to their fine, membrane-like outer "skins", shine like burnished aluminum by day. Many UFOS do either or both.

The Wassilko-Serecki theory is worthy of the profoundest consideration by all Ufologists. It has cogency and it does not conflict either with observation on the one hand, or with purely scientific possibility on the other. It may sound fantastic and even a bit farfetched, but it is no more whacky than was Charles Darwin's theory of the descent of man, and it does not offend so many cherished shibboleths, age-old notions, or preconceived ideas. But it does not profess to explain *all* UFOS.

There remain, then, two further categories of possibility. The first is that mooted by Admiral Fahrney, namely that there are intelligently controlled machines or constructions entering our atmosphere from outer space at speeds which we cannot as yet duplicate. This is a department that requires even more "explanation" than the Wassilko-Serecki "life-forms". It is a very vast subject indeed that calls for an exposition of a number of cosmological and astronomical principles before it can even be discussed. These vastnesses *can* be given in capsule form and this we propose to put forward in a subsequent article. Without acceptance of these established principles, however, and a willingness to take the accompanying statistical data as read, nobody should be asked to accept the idea of intelligent life existing elsewhere in the Universe as being possible. Let it be said, however, that, armed with the appropriate findings of modern science, nobody in their right mind should make so bold as to deny the possibility—nay, rather the probability—of there being life of an intelligence higher than ours on other heavenly bodies, and the possibility that these creatures have visited our small planet since early geological times.

The fourth possible category of UFOS is of quite another nature and is far the most unpleasant—as opposed to psychologically "unpleasant"—of all. The suggestion here is that some of these unknowns may be aeroforms, or planes, or other developments of Man's technology, and specifically of the Russian and/or United States armed forces, and/or other government agencies.

Unknown objects are reported as flying through our

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radar screen at a rate of about four per day. These reports, we know for a fact, are logged but are r e g u l a r l y treated as mere crackpot hallucinations and, although the logs are subsequently passed on to some central control, not one thing is ever done about them. Further, there is absolute and concrete evidence on paper that the Russians have a "saucer-like" aeroform or plane that was captured from the Germans over ten years ago along with its designers, its blueprints, and even the metallurgists who developed the tubes for its twelve rocket engines. This plane flew and there is an engineer who worked on it now living in the United States who saw it do so. This "plane" was disc-shaped and is alleged to be able to fly for fifteen hours without refuelling at speeds far in excess of those at which any pilot could remain alive or maintain control. One example is said to have done so over the Baltic, under robot control.

Such an aeroform could rise to the limits of the atmosphere, move in a matter of minutes over the United States, and then descend vertically to our soil, thus "hopping over" our radar screen. If such "planes" pick out-of-the-way country districts in which to land they could come and go at will without detection. If detected, or if their occupants were caught redhanded alighting, they could claim they were "Space-people" and probably get away with it among the awed locals. They might even indulge in a little psycho-warfare technique or frank propaganda by telling these locals that they are "all wrong", misguided and miserable due to faults of their government, and persuade them to believe that they are Spacemen and have come from another planet to help us put matters to rights for the benefit of humanity. They might even advocate the overthrow of the United States Government to pave the way for the coming of Salvation from the stars.

Does any of this, dear reader, sound at all familiar? Haven't we heard all this before, both in Communist manifestos and in the writings of those people who claim to have met and talked with Spacemen arriving in Flying Saucers?

The whole business is just too pat to be disconnected, and unfortunately it is getting just too common to be brushed off as either a coincidence or as mere "crackpotism!" What could be a better cover for penetration of "enemy" territory than some innocent do-gooder's backyard when the whole local populace regards that innocent as a harmless evangelist. What better fifth column than a bunch of innocent people dedicated to r i g h t i n g the

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wrongs of the world, fired with missionary zeal, sworn to secrecy, and fighting the monster of "misguided" Authority. After all, beautiful girl athletes in white ski-suits coming from another planet, far advanced in knowledge, sweetness, and light, are enough to impress anybody. The old Party-Line itself started out all sweetness and light, and lots of honest souls fell for it.

On the other hand, the low-flying, obviously guided "Saucers" may be our own inventions. If so, our Government is not doing the right thing by us. They may have very valid reasons for not telling us about them, but the business has now gone too far for secrecy. Too many sane citizens and radarscopes have seen these things, so if they are ours, it is high time we were appraised of this.

In the meantime, the science of Ufology has gotten itself established and it is up to all who are interested in its future to aid its growth and ultimate acceptance. To do this, the first thing we need is to establish some proper methodology, and in every new science the descriptive stage must come first. Classification or systematization comes next. We have had ten years of the former. We have got to get to work on the latter.

STATEMENT ON UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECTS BY ADMIRAL DELMAR S. FAHRNEY, USN (RET.)

Admiral Fahrney, while Chairman of the Board of Governors of the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena, in Washington, made the following statement:

"Reliable reports indicate that there are objects coming into our atmosphere at very high speeds...No agency in this country or Russia is able to duplicate at this time the speeds and accelerations which radars and observers indicate these flying objects are able to achieve.

"There are signs that an intelligence directs these objects because of the way they fly. The way they change position in formations would indicate that their motion is directed. The Air Force is collecting facual data on which to base an opinion, but time is required to sift and correlate the material. As long as such unidentified objects continue to navigate through the earth's atmosphere, there is an urgent need to know the facts.

"We are in a position to screen independently all UFO information coming in from our filter groups. General Albert C. Wedemeyer will serve the Committee as Evaluations Adviser and complete analyses will be arranged through leading scientists."

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grieve for a man

by THOMAS E. PURDOM

Nothing could be more moving than a man's death! It was impossible to understand how men could feel thus.

DON JULIAN Artego stood in the glittering suit of the matador and recoiled before the ultimate immorality.

"No." he said. "they couldn't feel that way. No one could feel that way."

"But it's true," the younger matador said. "And you won't be able to change them."

Don Julian shook his head. "I'll change them."

The younger man shrugged. He was dressed in a blue business suit and had not faced a bull in three years.

"You don't understand them," he said. "If you were younger you'd understand them."

"Do you understand them?"

"A little."

"It's impossible. I can't believe it. To say a machine's destruction is more moving than a man's death. No!"

He was a fine, slim man who had once been the greatest bullfighter in Spain. Now he was coming out of retirement to show these younger men and the crowd what bullfighting really was. He was about to do battle with what

Many have written and even grown lyrical about the dedicated grace with which the matadors, inheritors of the Roman games tradition, face Death so gaily, so deliberately. Philadelphian Thomas E. Purdom describes what is to happen to these anachonisms in a greyer Tomorrow.

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was, to him, the final immorality.

"It's only that you've never fought well," he said. "Let them see a real *corrida* and they'll turn away from their robots."

The younger man stiffened. "I've fought well," he said.

Don Julian grew silent and ashamed. In a few minutes he would be facing death in the center of the plaza. He shouldn't have said such a thing at such a time.

"I'm sorry," he said. "It's only that I can't understand how they can feel such a thing."

"It isn't that the robot handles the bulls so much better than us," the younger man said. "It's simply that they don't care if we die. But they do care if the robot gets smashed."

The trumpets blew. Don Julian rested his hands on the other man's shoulders.

"This will be for you," he said. "For all of us."

"Thank you. Good luck."

"Thank you. Goodbye."

He walked down the long hall to the sandy arena. He was afraid, as he had always been sick and afraid before going in, but he was also thinking deeply. To him the great point of the bullfight, the essential thing that had given it its excitement, was not the death of a man or a bull. It was seeing a man come close to death. And in being moved by that you affirmed your belief that a man's life was important.

But if seeing a machine wrecked moved you as much?

That must not be allowed to continue. Today he would make them feel what it meant for a man to defy death. Today he would bring them to their feet in admiration of his courage and fear of his dying.

A man was standing in the archway. He was the technician in charge of the robot and when Artego saw him he stopped for a minute to get his nerves under control. Then he moved, straight shouldered and erect, toward the sunlight.

"Welcome, Don Artego," said the small, quiet man.

"Good afternoon," Artego said.

"Are you ready to compete with my charge?"

"Yes."

"And what will you prove?"

He indicated the metal figure in the center of the plaza. "That it is nothing to see metal battered."

"I don't think you understand."

"I understand."

"You don't realize that this is the creation of a man's mind. Isn't it moving to see such a creation face destruction?"

"It is more moving to see a man tempt death."

The technician shrugged. "We'll see."

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Artego stepped onto the sand and the crowd applauded politely. Their real attention was on the metal thing in the center of the plaza.

He had seen it once before. It was perfectly and unapologetically a machine. Gleaming metal, shaped more like a bullet than a man, it had arms just long enough to hold the cape and wheels on its base instead of legs. It was a perfect machine, fashioned by a man who loved his mind's creation.

Artego walked over to it and looked it over. The crowd watched silently. Then he reached out and flipped it lightly with his finger.

The crowd stirred.

"Junk," he said. "For once I cheer for the bull."

He voice carried over the whole plaza. The crowd murmured angrily.

"Insulting pig," someone shouted.

"Go away," a man in the first row called. "We didn't ask for you."

"Yes, why don't you leave us alone?"

A few more people jeered and shouted. Artego stood stiffly in the center of the ring and stared back at them.

A small man ran across the plaza. "Excellency," he said.

"Yes?"

"The President asks you not to insult the other matador."

"Go to Hell," Artego said. "I swear at my car and I'll swear at this, too."

"The crowd will grow angry."

He looked around the plaza and for the first time this afternoon he was really afraid. The bulls had always frightened him but never too much. He knew he had to die someday and he preferred to die with grace and dignity. But now he feared the crowd.

He feared the eyes that looked on him as an unimportant intruder beside the essence of [illegible] they valued.

You are nothing, the eyes said. You are only a man like us. But this beside you is more than a man. This is grace and beauty and efficiency. This is the lovely thing that we have made. Go away.

"I'll show you," he said to them. "I'll show you!"

"Don Artego." The President's voice boomed over a loudspeaker.

Artego turned and bowed arrogantly. "Yes, Excellency?"

"You understand the order of this *corrida* which you have requested? First the matador of steel will fight. Then you will fight. Then both of you will fight together."

"I understand, Excellency."

"Then please retire. And do not anger us with such an insult of our ritual."

His eyes became cold and hard. He walked stiffly to the wall and leaped over it.

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The order of combat had been his own choosing. He wanted a chance to prove his belief that this ritual of watching a machine tempt destruction was without meaning. There could be no fairer chance than this.

They would watch the machine and they would watch him. Then they would watch both together. And they would see which was the more moving.

"El Toro!" sighed the crowd.

The bull plunged into the ring. The smooth thing in the center detected it with electronic beams and the jointless metal arms shook the cape. The bull charged.

It passed within inches of the robot. The machine and the cape turned in a slow, perfectly executed veronica.

"Uhhh." A deep, guttural roar came from the crowd.

The robot brought the bull back for another pass. And another. Each one brought the bull closer to the metal body.

Artego watched with interest. The passes were of classic perfection. The machine was the best of its kind and its designers had not intended it to use showy tricks. It moved with perfect functional efficiency.

"Ole!"

The bull's horn slid over metal.

Even Artego found his throat aching a little. This was a man's dream of what a matador could be, moving always with perfect grace and simplicity. It was for every minute what the best of men could only be sometimes.

And the crowd, the drinking, excited crowd, each of whom worked in some industry that contributed to the building of this thing, watched the dream of its mind in action. And feared and was moved by the possibility of its destruction.

Artego shook his head It was still not the same. It was still no more moving than watching a car slide over a cliff. To feel deeply about this and to be unmoved by a man doing the same thing less perfectly—that was unholy.

"Viva El Toro!" he shouted.

The black bull charged and charged again, held captive by the flawless machine. It was brave and charged straight and Artego looked at it with love and pride. He had loved every bull he had ever killed and the bravest ones best of all. It was not shameful to be killed by such an animal.

The bull turned around the robot in its own length. It halted, dazed, in the middle of the ring. The machine rolled away from it and took up a position near the far wall.

This was the part Artego hated most. They had elim-

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inated the horses and the picadors. The tourists couldn't stand them. They wanted to watch death but they wanted it to be sterile and unmessy.

The machine shook the cape and the bull charged. As it grazed past metal and headed toward the wall electric beams triggered firing circuits. A lance shot from the wall and buried itself in the bull's hump.

"Ahh," sighed the crowd.

Two more lances went in. Artego shook his head disgustedly and looked away.

There followed several passes with the muleta. Each was performed with that same flawless grace. Finally the machine squared the bull on its legs and awaited the charge with sword aimed.

The bull charged straight, head low, and the metal arm went in over the horns. The bull hooked as it went by, missed by a fraction of an inch and fell dead fifteen feet beyond its target.

The crowd came to its feet.

"Viva. Viva El Matador. Viva!"

Artego spat. Let them get young again out of that if they wanted to. He got as much of a thrill out of shooting at tin cans.

The crowd continued to applaud as the steel matador circled the ring. The President raised his hand and the technician ran out and cut off the bull's ears.

Then Artego walked into the center of the ring. He waited in the hot, bright sun before the chute.

A few people applauded and he bowed.

"Now I will show you what it is to watch a man die," he said.

A fat, greasy man stood up in the front row. "Then die, old fool," he shouted.

Artego flushed. He turned to face the chute and a minute later the bull burst into the sun.

It was a fine bull, the best they could get him for this day, and it charged straight and true at the cape. Artego turned it in the slow, perfect veronica that had once set crowds sighing.

"Come, bull," he whispered. "Help me show them."

Everything he had ever done, he did. It was the best twenty minutes of his life. Time after time the bull brushed his legs or his stomach while he remained calm and unmoved in the presence of death.

And at the end he went in over the horns, sucking in his stomach to avoid the point, and killed with classic perfection. Then he turned, proud of his work, and faced the crowd.

"Hot dogs," a vendor was shouting. "Real American hot dogs."

In the front row men were talking or flirting with women. Others, scattered through the audience, had idly turned

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to newspapers. In one corner a dice game was going on.

Those who were not occupied were politely bored.

In the rear of the plaza an old man stood up.

"Viva Don Julian! Viva the great Artego! Viva!"

The crowd, seeing the fight was over, applauded quickly. "Now bring out the matador of steel," a voice shouted.

"Yes, yes! Enough of this playing. Let's have the real thing!"

"Pigs." Don Julian cried. "Pigs!" Tears ran down his cheeks.

"Don Julian," called the President.

"Yes?"

"You may have the ears."

He bowed and cut off the ears with his own hands. Then he retreated from the ring.

"You see," said the technician.

"I warned you," said the young matador.

"I refuse to believe it!"

"You can't escape the facts," the young matador said.

The technician shrugged. "Times change. You have to change with them."

"But this is unholy! This is blasphemy!"

"I just do my work," the little man said. "I don't know about unholies and blasphemies."

He saw that their eyes were uncomprehending. And within him he felt a hot, furious need to make them writhe and cry.

"I'll show you. Watch!"

"Give up," the technician told him, "your time's over. It's my time now."

"I don't want to live in your time."

The young matador paled. "Don't," he said. "I know what you're thinking. Don't!"

Artego strode back into the ring. The matador of steel was already there. A force field ran down the middle of the plaza. They were visible to all but completely separated.

"Now," he said, "we'll see who you watch."

"Everything that Don Julian Artego does," the voice of the President said over the loudspeaker, "the matador of steel will also do. And at the same time."

Don Julian bowed and they applauded lightly. The robot bent slightly and the plaza shook.

"Viva. Viva the matador of steel!"

Artego turned and waited for the bull to come out. The two chutes opened and the two bulls burst into the sunshine.

He shook the cape and once again met the bull with a perfect veronica. His legs remained straight and rigid as the horns passed within six inches of them.

A second later the robot did the same thing.

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"Arrhh," groaned the crowd.

He moved the bull in closer with each pass. Then, desperate to make them watch, he did six slow, sculptured veronicas in a row. Each time the bull's horn slid over his body.

And every time he looked up at the crowd. They were watching the robot.

"God on Heaven," he murmured, "what must I do to reach them?"

He got down on his knees so he was helpless if he should misjudge the hook. The robot dug spikes into the ground so it couldn't move. They shook their capes.

"Ha. Toro. Ha!"

The horn slithered over his chest. Cloth ripped. At the same time he heard the clang of horn on metal.

"Arrh," grunted the crowd. "Ole!"

His eyes searched them hungrily. They were intent on the scratch on the robot's metal frame.

He got to his feet and brought the bull in for another pass. He turned it in its own length and brought it to a halt. Then he walked away, offering his back. The bull was too dazed to attack.

When he looked at the crowd they were watching the robot.

"Viva Don Julian," shouted the old man in the rear. "Viva Don Julian Artego!"

Only Don Julian heard him.

His face was hot and greasy with sweat. He looked at the dangling strips of cloth on his chest and saw he was bleeding. He wiped his hand in the blood and held it up to the crowd.

"See," he said. "blood. Just like you've got. Blood!"

A few of them looked over. Their eyes were uncomprehending.

"Christ in Heaven," he said, "what must I do?"

No one heard him. He was alone in the plaza. He and the old man and the bull.

The picing went quickly and smoothly. He brought the bull within inches of him and even let the lances graze his shoulder. No one bothered to look.

Then he took the sword and the muleta and faced the bull in the center of the plaza. Taking a deep breath, he began to swing the cape back and forth in front of his body.

It was the most dangerous of the passes. The swinging of the cape had to be timed so that the bull would hit it when it was to either side of the man. A slight miscalculation and the bull would charge right into his body.

This was his last attempt. If it didn't work, there was only one thing left.

"Ha, bull. Come and kill me. Ha!"

The bull charged. The cape

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swung like a pendulum from side to side.

The horn grazed his side as the beast went by.

"Ole!" shouted the crowd.

Artego looked. He searched for some sign that he had moved them.

They were watching the robot.

He beat his hand against his head. A long wail came from his lips. The crowd turned at last and looked at him.

There was a long, heavy silence. Then he spoke.

"I will show you," he said, "what it is to see a man die."

The silence continued. He was facing the force field so he could see the robot in its half of the plaza. The robot's bull and his bull were between them. His own bull looked very black and frightening as it lowered its head and watched him.

Very slowly, yet without theatricality, just as a man would who wants to hang onto every minute of life, he threw away his cape and sword.

"No," they shouted. "stop him!"

He snapped his fingers. "Come," he said to the bull, "kill me."

He had faced many bulls before, but this, his last, was the most difficult of all. He stood there with his legs straight and planted together and he did not close his eyes or move his feet.

The two bulls charged almost simultaneously. Don Julian's stomach turned over as he saw his bull bearing down on him.

"Christ in Heaven," he breathed, "do not let me run."

The bull's hump grew larger and blacker. Little dust clouds swirled about its feet. Don Julian's eyes focused on the horns.

They were smooth and white and glistened in the sun. At the last minute he threw his arms over his head. Then the horns cut up, sliding into his stomach, and he felt himself being lifted into the air.

At the same time he heard a crash and a clatter of metal.

The crowd came to its feet and screamed in horror.

Crucified on the horns, dying in the air, his head tossing on his neck, he saw, in his last few seconds, where their eyes were turned.

They were watching the twisted pile of metal at the other end of the plaza. And their faces were bloodless from shock.

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the saucer myth

by LESTER del REY

When observers see shapes in the sky, are these detailed and exact only in their own blindly unquestioning minds?

SOMETIMES when I read a magazine or attend a fan meeting, I get the feeling I no longer belong in science fiction. I never fitted into the comfortable majority of ideological pushovers too well, of course. I wasn't taught to believe in Santa Claus or Easter bunnies. In college, I couldn't swallow communism with blind faith, any more than I could stand the drooling fear of sections of the press. But I thought science fiction was essentially sane and healthy enough to inspire as much love and loyalty as anything in this human world.

Of course, it inevitably had its lunatic fringe There was a group of paleolithic minds who cowered in fear of deros when Shaver distorted Mme. Blavatsky. The neurotics tried to become psychotic with the help of dianetics. And recently, poltergeists have been remodelled into psionics and tamed with the aid of amulets and charms known as printed circuits, to the bemusement of the gullible.

Under all such transitory ripples, however, I thought there was a steady current of

It is difficult to adequately describe Lester del Rey, SF writer and editor, author of the recent NERVES (Ballantine) and one of the most respected writers in the field. Here he discusses "The Saucer Myth", as bluntly as at the meeting he mentions where, to quote the Fantasy Times *report, he "lashed out at flying saucers in no uncertain terms".*

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interest in science and respect for the methods and attitudes of scientific thought. I believed that the Smythe Report was of more interest than any number of myth reports.

I'm less sure now. Recently, at an annual conference of what I've considered one of the better s-f fan clubs, their only idea of promoting science fiction was to hold a symposium on flying saucers. This discussion wasn't even a pro-and-con affair. If L. Sprague de Camp hadn't dropped in as a voice of sanity and if I hadn't decided out of my own cussedness to make a futile attempt to insult the audience, there would have been no voice opposing saucers as the latter-day soul and embodiment of s-f interest. It seems that after nearly ten years of the myth, the fans no longer can realize that UFO stands for little but Unfounded Fatuous Optimism, not for Unquestionable Fact from the Oracles.

If the science in science fiction is based on no more than a willingness to accept, and if the readers can't spot the flaws that are part and parcel of the "scientific" attitudes of the saucer "observers", then I want *out!* Science has nothing to do with having a mind so open that the wind blows through it.

Science is based on *what* and *why*, not on *what-if* or *why-not*. It has to be that way because no other method of handling our knowledge has worked, though all have been tried in the past. In science, any man has the right to present any theory as an explanation of observed facts, provided (1) that his facts can be checked or established beyond reasonable doubt; (2) that his theories do not violate what is already known; (3) that the steps of logic involved in arriving at those theories can be presented; and (4) that the burden of the proof of his theories lies with him. It is helpful if his theories tend to make understanding of other facts easier, and if they lead to tests which can be performed to check them. It is always suspicious, though not neccessarily damaging, if his theories make things much more complicated than they were before. But the important idea is that a theory is nothing but speculation, and that he cannot demand that others automatically accept it even to the point of checking it; if he wants his idea to win acceptance, he must prove its value.

So far, the boys who are pushing the saucer myth seem to be demanding at least some measure of qualified acceptance, without doing the work of proving anything. They present what they call proof, but no scientist could dare to use such proof of anything in any other field.

There have been ten years

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for some kind of proof to come in. I've tried to find what has been learned positively during that time, and I wind up with only a large body of what-if material. I can find more proof of ghosts, witches and werewolves than I can of anything of any significance whatsoever behind the flying saucer tales.

People have given accounts of seeing saucers. But there have been far more accounts of ghosts being seen. Men of the best possible reputation have reported ghost sightings. Men of considerable technical training have sighted apparitions. Huge groups have seen ghosts, and agreed on such a sighting. There has been far more agreement in the accounts generally than in the accounts of the saucers. The same applies to the hearing of banshees, meeting Satan, leprechauns, werewolves and vampires; in the case of vampires, at least, there was often the actual physical evidence of the mysterious weakening, loss of blood, and death.

This sadly weakens the biggest argument of the saucer fans, though they seem to have an almost majestic ability to disregard the weakness: "With so much evidence from so many observers, there must be something to it." Yet only the most extreme of the cultists would accept the same argument in favor of vampires or ghosts!

Reports of observers are unfortunately not good evidence. In the first place, they aren't necessarily all truthful. Any lawyer would be forced to admit that the most impossibly sound documentation of a man's character is no absolute proof of his veracity in any given circumstance. Human beings are capable of lying when they have no reason whatever for it—and even more so for local fame, or to cover up some real activity. The testimony of anyone as to the high character (or the obvious sincerity) of the observer doesn't make this much less the case, either.

Men can have fantasies—even men who are seemingly rational and who really want to be truthful. Men can be confused into seeing faces in clouds, or having a vague shape become sharp, detailed and exact in their own mind.

And worst of all, men have very little ability to judge size, distance, or even shape beyond a certain limited extent. The eyes are too close for any real stereoscopic vision to work beyond a hundred feet. We determine distance and other factors beyond that by other complicated habits of evaluation. Anything in the sky is hard to judge. Repeated tests have proved that a small object of some vague shape travelling at a comparatively low height and slow speed can be reported honestly by even trained

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observers as something high up, of some highly complicated pattern, and moving at incredible speed.

If science must accept the reports and stories about the saucers as evidence, then the scientists had better get to work at once on checking back over all the sightings of witches on broomsticks and the other nonsense of observers.

But, of course, there are pictures! Well, that is...

Umm, it's amazing how few and how bad those pictures turn out to be after the marvelously detailed saucer accounts. In a country where millions of feet of film are processed regularly, and where everyone takes pictures of Aunt Sue at the beach, you'd think that the first impulse would be to get that extraordinary event down on film.

Yet the more exact the sighting, the less pictorial evidence there is. The photographs we have leave much to be desired. True, Adamski had pictures, but even amateur sleuths arrived at the facts about them—the object pictured was just too plainly an old-style lamp holder, with the workmanship that of a small object, not of a big one. His picture was too plain. The others are too vague.

One objection has been that the camera can't see as well as the eye—which is mostly nonsense. A camera can take a sharp, detailed picture faster than the human eye, at just as great a distance, etc. The laws of optics don't change much, in spite of any mystic hankering we may have to be better than mechanical devices.

I've looked at quite a few pictures. Again, we have no evidence of distance, or hence of true size. And we usually find no real evidence of anything more than a vague shape. There are a few sharp pictures, but with less detail than there should be. I'm sure any scientist would be willing to examine one that did show detail; but these seem to evaporate on a request to examine one closely.

A high-powered magnification of a negative—not a print, please—can usually turn up amazing amount of information. The grains of silver in the negative emulsion can give a fair indication of the angle of light striking the film—and hence of the distance of the lens from the film. By care in this matter, the close-up film of a small object can be separated much of the time from a true picture of some object at a great distance. Needless to say, there have been times when good pictures of saucers turned out to be nothing but table-top mockeries.

Also from a negative under high magnification, an amazing amount of detail can be recovered, if the distance is

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really great enough to justify using the infinity marking on the lens—but less detail will appear if the eye has guessed the distance wrongly. Detail is precisely what does not show up in most negatives.

Prints, incidentally, are worth precisely nothing. It's hard enough at best to determine how much fakery can be done, using a negative. A good man with an airbrush can work up a print, then recopy it on film, and reprint it until it would fool nearly anyone. It just happens to be a little easier to spot any false note on the negative.

I have yet to see a film negative which showed anything of any value—other than vague shapes that could be anything, including dirt in the developer—and which would stand up under close scrutiny. If there is any such evidence, it should be brought forth with great willingness, and science would be at least geuinely interested. It would still be poor proof—but it would be something. Unfortunately, the men who seem to have the most pictures also seem to have the largest amount of nothing, on close examination.

I wouldn't accept the details of a new species of butterfly on such evidence. Why in hell should anyone expect a scientist who has serious work to do to take time off and give serious attention to such evidence when it is supposed to support something so fantastic that even the fans can't hope to explain it adequately?

Gentlemen, the burden of the proof is on your shoulders. Why not weed out the trash yourselves first, and then present what you have in a form that can be used to convince science you at least have more than a tale full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. (I won't give the rest of that quotation from Shakespeare, though it's very much in my mind.)

Also, a theory is supposed to explain something. So far, the best explanations on the subject of the saucers have been so full of arrant nonsense that the better mind among the saucer fans (and unfortunately, some quite nice and intelligent men have wasted their time on the hobby) will have no part of them.

The theory, stripped to its very basic nature, seems to be that there are things moving through our atmosphere that we don't know about or understand. These may be of more than one type.

So what?

There are a million places where science dosn't know all the answers. Why should the vague jumble of "facts" of all types the saucer men present win the attention the fans demand? All right, there are objects in the sky, or lights, or something else, which may not

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all be fully explained by known facts. Of course there must be—I can't even explain the exact nature of every grain of dust, and science hasn't catalogued every germ in the air, I suppose. Maybe there are things there which are larger and have some significance. But what significance?

Foreign planes? That's obviously assinine. No foreign power would fly over our territory repeatedly to let us know about such things, and to risk giving up the secret in case of an accidental landing, any more than we would risk useless cruising over Russia with our latest developments.

Our own planes? If so, then the departments of the government deny it; and that means that it isn't something for science to investigate, since it is known somewhere, but is secret. Anyhow, if we have such marvels, why are we in such a tither over the arms race?

Objects from outer space? Well, that implies intelligent guidance. Are there any signs of this? There are claims there are. Yet for ten years, account after account has come in, indicating large numbers of such objects, sent out at what must be tremendous expense—for what purpose? Any race intelligent enough to build saucers must have at least enough intelligence to have some purpose in mind. Is that purpose satisfied by the childish business of scaring a few crackpots and stirring up a few people to waste time trying to contact them? Ten years of hanging around and making no provable contact—ten years of ineptitude in observing us without letting us know we're being studied, or in trying to contact us without contacting us? Ten years of just frittering around aimlessly, after such efforts in getting here? Ten years even of not knowing there is intelligent life here, when our own technological developments are flying through the air?

Why did they waste the tremendous efforts in building their craft (whatever the things may be like) or of wasting the energy to get here? The amount of energy would be tremendous, too. Maybe they can even exceed the speed of light (though why should we suppose they can?), but they surely aren't doing it without energy!

And since they must be from beyond the Solar system, if they are intelligently-built craft from space, the energy needed to reach us is almost beyond our power of imagining—so great that it becomes stupendous in amount of fuel needed, even if they should have the ultimate energy of the total conversion of mass to drive.

They don't come from Mars or Venus or Jupiter—or at least, science has every rea-

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son to believe they can not and no reason to believe they can. We have been able to detect radio emanations from the planets, and our information theory has developed to the point where we could detect any evidence of intelligence or information on such signals; we might not be able to decode them, but we could easily determine that they carried intelligent m e s s a g e s. They do not. Nor do they carry what would indicate QRM to us—that is, the radio interference caused by technical machinery.

Magnetic power (shades of Ehrenhaft!) is still not free from such an objection, since electrical and magnetic fields interact—and anyhow, why should we accept such a hypothesis w i t h o u t a single shred of evidence to back up the idea of magnetic power?

(In fact, the explanations of the original theory become nothing but a lot more *why-nots,* each of them with its lack of evidence and its needless cluttering of improbability on top of improbability. Don't expect science to accept such a mess, when even the basic idea behind all this hasn't been made more acceptable.)

There are many more reasons for being pretty sure that no such saucers are coming here from our own planets. So far, nobody has come up with any convincing evidence—convincing to anyone trained to weigh evidence in any way—that they are coming from the sun's planets.

But there's even less reason why they should come from some other solar system for no good purpose. A minimum of four light years of space to be travelled is not conductive to simple curiosity, and any race that could make such a journey would not be afraid of us, would have some reason for more than a single ship coming, and would either be capable of hiding from us or else getting in touch with us.

Of course, you can suppose that maybe they have telepathy and are hanging around reading our minds. (Why should they be interested in us, anyhow? All we have is a t o m i c power, and that wouldn't affect them.) But that's just adding still another unexplained improbability on top of another. Why can't there still be witches, but now so modern that they've mastered invisibility?

It wouldn't be so bad if there wasn't a fair explanation that satisfies much of the so-called evidence. Donald Menzel didn't give any absolute explanation, nor was he trying to. But he did come up with a theory which does what most of the saucer theories don't do—it serves as a possible explanation within the framework of the knowledge we have. Most of the objects could be caused by re-

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fraction in the air, and he has demonstrated how this might work—and how anyone can create the same effect! (That's one of the things a good theory should point out.)

He may be quite wrong—but any other theory must have more validity on its side than his, if science is to pay any attention to it. So far, none seems to have as much.

And don't say that pictures prove there were real objects there. A mirage can be photographed, just as it can be seen. It isn't something of astral nature (if anything is); it's made up of light waves which can be focussed on film and which will activate photo-chemical changes.

Of course, there is still the point raised that the Army spent time and money to investigate the saucers, so there must be something to them; surely the Army wouldn't waste it's time otherwise. Most assuredly, it would!

The duty of the Army is to protect this country, and to do so it must take into account almost any possibility. The FBI answers and investigates all kinds of stories, knowing that most of them will be false—because it can't miss even the slight chance of one being true. The same applies to the Army. If there is even a slight chance that there just might be something behind one of the various saucer sightings, then it has to investigate them all to be sure. And since there was a whole mess of so-called evidence, the job took time and effort. But it doesn't prove that there was anything real behind the investigation.

Then, as a final bit on that, there is the fact that the Army turned up radar evidence for the saucers. This is most convincing to many who refuse to use the methods of science, but who think that any scientific gadget gives authenticity to anything. However, it neglects the nature of radar. Radar is simply a means for detecting anything which will reflect radio waves of high frequency when they bounce back. It's well known to radarmen that even such things as moisture in the air can cause cockeyed results. Radar is sometimes much easier to fool than the eye, sometimes less easy to fool. But a radar trace doesn't automatically prove that there is anything hard and solid present.

I've left out the men who have talked with beings from the saucers. This is a huge subject which I'd rather not touch here, just as I'd rather not be near enough to touch the men who may quite sincerely believe that they have done such things as talk to Venutians. I know a woman who believes quite sincerely that she talks regularly with the bird men of Mars. I can't

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prove she's wrong, since I have never been to Mars, but I see no reason to change my opinion of the density of Martian atmosphere and the surface gravity of the planet, even though they indicate no bird people could fly there. She says they do fly, and she means it. I say they don't so far as I can determine. If sincerity is any proof, of course, she will win over me, any time.

I also refuse to accept the ideas that there are men who are in contact with other races in the saucers—highly advanced races at that—but who somehow can't come up with a single tiny bit of new and demonstrable information.

If we must set up a scientific society to investigate every bit of speculative nonsense that comes along, then my vote would go to a scientific investigation of sea serpents, with attention to the Loch Ness monster. That, at least is something interesting. There have been so many accounts of sea serpents that there must be something behind it all, obviously. And think of what we could learn from finding a true living sea serpent—particularly one as smart and gifted with a perverted sense of humor as the monster. Or maybe vampires would be even more interesting, since they offer a key to the secret of immortality.

If men want to spend their time on the hobby of flying saucers, I don't object. But why drag it into science fiction? Why take up space that would be so much more profitably spent on interesting exploration of other myths?

As science, the myth is too ridiculous to justify the paper spent on it. As a myth, it presents a singular lack of interesting detail and significance in the life of mankind. They don't even make a basis for a good fantasy, damn it! As science fiction, they don't belong as much as did Shaver's unspeakable deros.

In other words, flying saucers simply aren't my dish of tea.

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lighter than you think

by NELSON BOND

Sandy's eyes needed only jet propulsion to become flying saucers. Wasn't Pat wonderful, she beamed, at everyone.

SOME JOKER in the dear, dead days now virtually beyond recall won two-bit immortality by declaring that, "What this country needs is a good five cent cigar."

Which is, of course, Victorian malarkey. What this country *really* needs is a good five cent nickel. Or perhaps a good cigar-shaped spaceship. There's a fortune waiting somewhere out in space for the man who can go out there and claim it. A fortune! And if you think I'm just talking through my hat, lend an ear...

Joyce started the whole thing. Or maybe I did when for the umpteenth time I suggested she should marry me. She smiled in a way that showed she didn't disapprove of my persistence, but loosed a salvo of devastating negatives.

"No deal," she crisped decisively. "Know why? No dough!"

"But, sugar," I pleaded, "two can live as cheaply as one—"

"This is true," replied Joyce, "only of guppies. Understand, Don, I don't mind changing my name from Car-

It's possible that you won't agree with us that Pat Pending's latest adventure is a delightful story—possible IF you haven't been used to laughing in recent years. Blue Book printed more than a dozen of these stories by Nelson Bond about the "greatest inventulator of all time".

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ter to Mallory. In fact, I'd rather like to. But I have no desire whatever to be known to the neighbors as 'that poor little Mrs. Mallory in last year's coat.'

"I'll marry you," she continued firmly, "when, as and if you get a promotion."

Her answer was by no stretch of the imagination a reason for loud cheers, handsprings and cartwheels. Because I'm a Federal employee. The United States Patent Office is my beat. There's one nice thing to be said about working for the bewhiskered old gentleman in the star-spangled stovepipe and striped britches: it's permanent. Once you get your name inscribed on the list of Civil Service employees it takes an act of Congress to blast it off again. And of course I don't have to remind you how long it takes *that* body of vote-happy windbags to act. Terrapins in treacle are greased lightning by comparison.

But advancement is painfully slow in a department where discharges are unheard of and resignations rare. When I started clerking for this madhouse I was assistant to the assistant Chief Clerk's assistant. Now, ten years later, by dint of mighty effort and a cultivated facility for avoiding Senatorial investigations, I've succeeded in losing only one of those redundant adjectives.

Being my secretary, Joyce certainly realized this. But women have a remarkable ability to separate business and pleasure. So:

"A promotion," she insisted. "Or at least a good, substantial raise."

"In case you don't know it," I told her gloomily, "you are displaying a lamentably vulgar interest in one of life's lesser values. Happiness, not money, should be man's chief goal."

"What good is happiness," demanded Joyce, "if you can't buy money with it?"

"Why hoard lucre?" I sniffed. "You can't take it with you."

"In that case," said Joyce flatly, "I'm not going. There's no use arguing, Don. I've made up my mind—"

At this moment our dreary little impasse was ended by a sudden tumult outside my office. There was a squealing shriek, the shuffle of footsteps, the pounding of fists upon my door. And over all the shrill tones of an old, familiar voice high-pitched in triumph.

"Let me in! I've got to see him instantaceously. This time I've got it; I've absolutely *got* it!"

Joyce and I gasped, then broke simultaneously for the door as it flew open to reveal a tableau resembling the Laocoon groop *sans* snake and party of the third part. Back to the door and struggling valiantly to defend it stood the

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receptionist, Miss Thomas. Held briefly but volubly at bay was a red-thatched, buck-toothed individual—and I *do* mean individual!—with a face like the map of Eire, who stopped wrestling as he saw us, and grinned delightedly.

"Hello, Mr. Mallory," he said. "Hi, Miss Joyce."

"Pat!" we both cried at once. "Pat Pending!"

Miss Thomas, a relative newcomer to our bailiwick, seemed baffled by the warmth of our greeting. She entered the office with our visitor, and as Joyce and I pumphandled him enthusiastically she asked, "You—you *know* this gentleman, Mr. Mallory?"

"I should say we do!" I chortled. "Pat, you old naughty word! Where on earth have you been hiding lately?"

"Surely you've heard of the great Patrick Pending, Miss Thomas?" asked Joyce.

"Pending?" faltered Miss Thomas. "I seem to have heard the name. Or seen it somewhere—"

Pat beamed upon her companionably. Stepping to my desk he up-ended the typewriter and pointed to a legend in tiny letters stamped into the frame: *Reg. U.S. Pat. Off.—Pat. Pending.*

"Here, perhaps?" he suggested "I invented this. And the airplane, and the automobile, and—oh, ever so many things. You'll find my name inscribed on every one.

"I," he announced modestly, "am Pat Pending—the greatest inventulator of all time."

Miss Thomas stared at me goggle-eyed.

"*Is* he?" she demanded. "I mean—*did* he?"

I nodded solemnly.

"Not only those, but a host of other marvels. The bacular clock, the transmatter, the predictograph—"

Miss Thomas turned on Pat a gaze of fawning admiration. "How wonderful!" she breathed.

"Oh, nothing, really," said Pat, wriggling.

"But it is! Most of the things brought here are so absurd. Automatic hat-tippers, self-defrosting galoshes, punching bags that defend themselves—" Disdainfully she indicated the display collection of screwball items we call our Chamber of Horrors. "It's simply marvelous to meet a man who has invented things really worth while."

Honestly, the look in her eyes was sickening. But was Pat nauseated? Not he! The big goon was lapping it up like a famished feline. His simpering smirk stretched from ear to there as he murmured, "Now, Miss Thomas—"

"Sandra, Mr. Pending," she sighed softly. "To you just plain...Sandy. Please?"

"Well, Sandy—" Pat gulped.

I said disgustedly, "Look, you two—break it up! Love

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at first sight is wonderful in books, but in a Federal office I'm pretty sure it's unconstitutional, and it *may* be subversive. Would you mind coming down to earth? Pat, you barged in here squalling about some new invention. Is that correct?"

With an effort Pat wrenched his gaze from his new-found admirer and nodded soberly.

"That's right, Mr. Mallory. And a great one, too. One that will revolutionate the world. Will you give me an applicaceous form, please? I want to file it immediately."

"Not so fast, Pat. You know the routine. What's the nature of this remarkable discovery?"

"You may write it down," said Pat grandiloquently, "as Pat Pending's lightening rod."

I glanced at Joyce, and she at me, then both of us at Pending.

"But, Pat," I exclaimed, "that's ridiculous! Ben Franklin invented the lightning rod two hundred years ago."

"I said *lightening*," retorted my redheaded friend, "not *lightning*. My invention doesn't conduct electricity *to* the ground, but *from* it." He brandished a slim baton which until then I had assumed to be an ordinary walking-stick. "With this," he claimed, "I can make things weigh as much or as little as I please!"

The eyes of Sandy Thomas needed only jet propulsion to become flying saucers.

"Isn't he wonderful, Mr. Mallory?" she gasped.

But her enthusiasm wasn't contagious. I glowered at Pending coldly.

"Oh, come now, Pat!" I scoffed. "You can't really believe that yourself. After all, there *are* such things as basic principles. Weight is not a variable factor. And so far as I know, Congress hasn't repealed the Law of Gravity."

Pat sighed regretfully.

"You're always so hard to convince, Mr. Mallory," he complained. "But—oh, well! Take this."

He handed me the baton. I stared at it curiously. It looked rather like a British swagger stick: slim, dainty, well balanced. But the ornamental gadget at its top was not commonplace. It seemed to be a knob or a dial of some kind, divided into segments scored with vernier markings. I gazed at Pending askance.

"Well, Pat? What now?"

"How much do you weigh, Mr. Mallory?"

"One sixty-five," I answered.

"You're sure of that?"

"I'm not. But my bathroom scales appeared to be. This morning. Why?"

"Do you think Miss Joyce could lift you?"

I said thoughtfully, "Well, that's an idea. But I doubt it. She won't even let me try to support *her*."

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"I'm serious, Mr. Mallory. Do you think she could lift you with one hand?"

"Don't be silly! Of course not. Nor could you."

"There's where you're wrong," said Pending firmly. "She can—and will."

He reached forward suddenly and twisted the metal cap on the stick in my hands. As he did so, I loosed a cry of alarm and almost dropped the baton. For instantaneously I experienced a startling, flighty giddiness, a sudden loss of weight that made me feel as if my soles were treading on sponge rubber, my shoulders sprouting wings.

"Hold on to it!" cried Pat. Then to Joyce, "Lift him, Miss Joyce."

Joyce faltered, "How? Like th-this?" and touched a finger to my midriff. Immediately my feet left the floor. I started flailing futilely to trample six inches of ozone back to the solid floorboards. To no avail. With no effort whatever Joyce raised me high above her head until my dazed dome was shedding dandruff on the ceiling!

"Well, Mr. Mallory," said Pat, "do you believe me now?"

"Get me down out of here!" I howled. "You *know* I can't stand high places!"

"You now weigh less than ten pounds—"

"Never mind the statistics. I feel like a circus balloon. How do I get down again?"

"Turn the knob on the cane," advised Pat, "to your normal weight. Careful, now! *Not so fast!*"

His warning came too late. I hit the deck with a resounding thud, and the cane came clattering after. Pat retrieved it hurriedly, inspected it to make sure it was not damaged. I glared at him as I picked myself off the floor.

"You might show some interest in *me*," I grumbled. "I doubt if that stick will need a liniment rubdown tonight. Okay, Pat. You're right and I'm wrong, as you usually are. That modern variation of a witch's broomstick *does* operate. Only—how?"

"That dial at the top governs weight," explained Pat. "When you turn it—"

"Skip that. I know how it is operated. I want to know what makes it work?"

"Well," explained Pat, "I'm not certain I can make it clear, but it's all tied in with the elemental scientific problems of mass, weight, gravity and electric energy. What *is* electricity, for example—"

"I used to know," I frowned. "But I forget."

Joyce shook her head sorrowfully.

"Friends," she intoned, "let us all bow our heads. This is a moment of great tragedy. The only man in the world who ever knew what electricity is—and he has forgotten!"

"That's the whole point,"

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agreed Pending. "No one knows what electricity really is. All we know is how to use it. Einstein has demonstrated that the force of gravity and elecrical energy are kindred; perhaps different aspects of a common phenomenon. That was my starting point."

"So this rod, which enables you to defy the law of gravity, is electrical?"

"Electricaceous," corrected Pat. "You see, I have transmogrified the polarifitv of certain ingredular cellulations. A series of disentrigulated helicosities, activated by hypermagnetation, set up a disruptular wave motion which results in—countergravity!"

And there you are! Ninety-nine percent of the time Pat Pending talks like a normal human being. But ask him to explain the mechanism of one of his inventions and linguistic hell breaks loose. He begins jabbering like a schizophrenic parrot reading a Sanskrit dictionary backward! I sighed and surrendered all hope of ever actually learning *how* his great new discovery worked. I turned my thoughts to more important matters.

"Okay, Pat. We'll dismiss the details as trivial and get down to brass tacks. What is your invention used for?"

"Eh?" said the redhead.

It's not enough that an idea is practicable," I pointed out. "It must also be practical to be of any value in this frenzied modern era. What good is your invention?"

"What good," demanded Joyce, "is a newborn baby?"

"Don't change the subject," I suggested. "Or come to think of it, maybe you should. At the diaper level, life is just one damp thing after another. But how to turn Pat's brainchild into cold, hard cash—that's the question before the board now.

"Individual flight *a la* Superman? No dice. I can testify from personal experience that once you get up there you're completely out of control. And I can't see any sense in humans trying to fly with jet flames scorching their base of operations.

"Elevators? Derricks? Building cranes? Possible. But lifting a couple hundred pounds is one thing. Lifting a few tons is a horse of a different color.

"No, Pat," I continued, "I don't see just how—"

Sandy Thomas squeaked suddenly and grasped my arm.

"That's it, Mr. Mallory!" she cried. "That's it!"

"Huh? What's what?"

"You wanted to know how Pat could make money from his invention. You've just answered your own question."

"I have?"

"Horses! Horse racing, to be exact. You've heard of handicaps, haven't you?"

"I'm overwhelmed with them," I nodded wearily. "A secretary who repulses my

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honorable advances, a receptionist who squeals in my ear—"

"Listen, Mr. Mallory, what's the last thing horses do before they go to the post?"

"Check the tote board," I said promptly, "to find out if I've got any money on them. Horses hate me. They've formed an equine conspiracy to prove to me the ancient adage that a fool and his money are soon parted."

"Wait a minute!" chimed in Joyce thoughtfully. "I know what Sandy means. They weigh in. Is that right?"

"Exactly! The more weight a horse is bearing, the slower it runs. That's the purpose of handicapping. But if a horse that was supposed to be carrying more than a hundred pounds was actually only carrying *ten*—Well, you see?"

Sandy paused, breathless. I stared at her with a gathering respect.

"Never underestimate the power of a woman," I said, "when it comes to devising new and ingenious methods of perpetrating petty larceny. There's only one small fly in the ointment, so far as I can see. How do we convince some racehorse owner he should become a party to this gentle felony?"

"Oh, you don't have to," smiled Sandy cheerfully. "I'm already convinced."

"You? You own a horse?"

"Yes. Haven't you ever heard of Tapwater?"

"Oh, sure! That drip's running all the time!"

Joyce tossed me a reproving glance.

"This is a matter of gravity, Donald," she stated, "and you keep treating it with levity. Sandy, do you *really* own Tapwater? He's the colt who won the Monmouth Futurity, isn't he?"

"That's right. And four other starts this season. That's been our big trouble. He shows such promise that the judges have placed him under a terrific weight handicap. To run in next week's Gold Stakes, for instance, he would have to carry 124 pounds. I was hesitant to enter him because of that. But with Pat's new invention—" She turned to Pat, eyes glowing—"he could enter and win!"

Pat said uncertainly. "I don't know. I don't like gambling. And it doesn't seem quite ethical, somehow—"

I asked Sandy, "Suppose he ran carrying 124. What would be the probable odds?"

"High," she replied. "*Very* high. Perhaps as high as forty to one."

"In that case," I decided, "it's not only ethical, it's a moral obligation. If you're opposed to gambling, Pat, what better way can you think of to put the parimutuels out of business?"

"And besides," Sandy pointed out, "this would be a wonderful opportunity to display your new discovery before an

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audience of thousands. Well, Pat? What do you say?"

Pat hesitated, caught a glimpse of Sandy's pleading eyes, and was lost.

"Very well," he said. "We'll do it. Mr. Mallory, enter Tapwater in the Gold Stakes. We'll put on the most spectaceous exhibition in the history of gambilizing!"

Thus it was that approximately one week later our piratical little crew was assembled once again, this time in the paddock at Laurel. In case you're an inland aborigine, let me explain that Laurel race track (from the township of the same name) is where horse fanciers from the District of Columbia go to abandon their Capitol and capital on weekends.

We were briefing our jockey—a scrawny youth with a pair of oversized ears—on the use of Pat's lightening rod. Being short on gray matter as well as on stature, he wasn't getting it at all.

"You mean," he said for the third or thirty-third time, "you don't want I should *hit* the nag with this bat?"

"Heavens, no!" gasped Pat, blanching. "It's much too delicate for that."

"Don't fool yourself, mister. Horses can stand a lot of leather."

"Not the horse, stupid," I said. "The bat. This is the only riding crop of its kind in the world. We don't want it damaged. All you have to do is *carry* it. We'll do the rest."

"How about setting the dial, Don?" asked Joyce.

"Pat will do that just before the horses move onto the track. Now let's get going. It's weigh-in time."

We moved to the scales with our rider. He stepped aboard the platform, complete with silks and saddle, and the spinner leaped to a staggering 102, whereupon the officials started gravely handing him little leather sacks.

"What's this?" I whispered to Sandy. "Prizes for malnutrition? He must have won all the blackjacks east of the Mississippi."

"The handicap," she whispered back. "Lead weights at one pound each."

"If he starts to lose," I ruminated, "they'd make wonderful ammunition—"

"One hundred and twenty-four," announced the chief weigher-inner. "Next entry!"

We returned to Tapwater. The jockey fastened the weights to his gear, saddled up and mounted. From the track came the traditional bugle call. Sandy nodded to Pat.

"All right, Pat. Now!"

Pending twisted the knob on his lightening rod and handed the stick to the jockey. The little horseman gasped, rose three inches in his stirrups, and almost let go of the baton.

"H-hey!" he exclaimed. "I feel funny. I feel—"

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"Never mind that," I told him. "Just you hold on to that rod until the race is over. And when you come back, give it to Pat immediately. Understand?"

"Yes. But I feel so—so lightheaded—"

"That's because you're featherbrained," I advised him. "Now, get going. Giddy-ap, Dobbin!"

I patted Tapwater's flank, and so help me Newton, I think that one gentle tap pushed the colt half way to the starting gate! He pattered across the turf with a curious bouncing gait as if he were running on tiptoe. We hastened to our seats in the grandstand.

"Did you get all the bets down?" asked Joyce.

I nodded and displayed a deck of ducats. "It may not have occurred to you, my sweet," I announced gleefully, "but these pasteboards are transferrable on demand to rice and old shoes, the sweet strains of *Oh, Promise Me!* and the scent of orange blossoms. You insisted I should have a nest egg before you would murmur, 'I do'? Well, after this race these tickets will be worth—" I cast a swift last glance at the tote board's closing odds, quoting Tapwater at 35 to 1—"approximately seventy thousand dollars!"

"Donald!" gasped Joyce. "You didn't bet all your savings?"

"Every cent," I told her cheerfully. "Why not?"

"But if something should go wrong! If Tapwater should lose!"

"He won't. See what I mean?"

For even as we were talking, the bell jangled, the crowd roared, and the horses were off. Eight entries surged from the starting gate. And already one full length out in front pranced the weightfree, lightfoot Tapwater!

At the quarterpost our colt had stretched his lead to three lengths, and I shouted in Pending's ear, "How much does that jockey weigh, anyway?"

"About six pounds," said Pat. "I turned the knob to cancel one eighteen."

At the half, all the other horses could glimpse of Tapwater was heels. At the three-quarter post he was so far ahead that the jockey must have been lonely. As he rounded into the stretch I caught a binocular view of his face, and he looked dazed and a little frightened. He wasn't actually *riding* Tapwater. The colt was simply skimming home, and he was holding on for dear life to make sure he didn't blow off the horse's back. The result was a foregone conclusion, of course. Tapwater crossed the finish line nine lengths ahead, setting a new track record.

The crowd went wild. Over the hubbub I clutched Pat's

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arm and bawled, "I'll go collect our winnings. Hurry down to the track and swap that lightening rod for the real bat we brought along. He'll have to weigh out again, you know. Scoot!"

The others vanished paddockward as I went for the big payoff. It was dreary at the totalizer windows. I was one of a scant handfull who had bet on Tapwater, so it took no time at all to scoop into the valise I had brought along the seventy thousand bucks in crisp, green lettuce which an awed teller passed across the counter. Then I hurried back to join the others in the winner's circle, where bedlam was not only reigning but pouring. Flashbulbs were popping all over the place, cameramen were screaming for just one more of the jockey, the owner, the fabulous Tapwater. The officials were vainly striving to quiet the tumult so they could award the prize. I found Pending worming his way out of the heart of the crowd.

"Did you get it?" I demanded.

He nodded, thrust the knobbed baton into my hand.

"You substituted the normal one?"

Again he nodded. Hastily I thrust the lightening rod out of sight into my valise, and we elbowed forward to share the triumphant moment. It was a great experience. I felt giddy with joy; I was walking on little pink clouds of happiness. Security was mine at last. And Joyce, as well.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" cried the chief official. "Your attention, please! Today we have witnessed a truly spectacular feat: the setting of a new track record by a champion racing under a tremendous handicap. I give you a magnificent racehorse—*Tapwater!*"

"That's right, folks!" I bawled, carried away by the excitement. "Give this little horse a great big hand!"

Setting the example, I laid down the bag, started clapping vigorously. From a distance I heard Pat Pending's agonized scream.

"Mr. Mallory—the suitcase! Grab it!"

I glanced down, belatedly aware of the danger of theft. But too late. The bag had disappeared.

"Hey!" I yelled. "Who swiped my bag? Police!"

"Up there, Mr. Mallory!" bawled Pat. "Jump!"

I glanced skyward. Three feet above my head and rising swiftly was the valise in which I had cached not only our winnings but Pat's gravity-defying rod! I leaped—but in vain. I was *still* making feeble, futile efforts to make like the moon-hurdling nursery rhyme cow when quite a while later two strong young men in white jackets

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came and jabbed me with a sedative...

Later, when time and barbiturates had dulled the biting edge of my despair, we assembled once again in my office and I made my apologies to my friends.

"It was all my fault," I acknowledged. "I should have realized Pat hadn't readjusted the rod when I placed it in my bag. It felt lighter. But I was so excited—"

"It was *my* fault," mourned Pat, "for not changing it immediately. But I was afraid someone might see me."

"Perhaps if we hired an airplane—?" I suggested.

Pat shook his head.

"No, Mr. Mallory. The rod was set to cancel 118 pounds. The bag weighed less than twenty. It will go miles beyond the reach of any airplane before it settles into an orbit around earth."

"Well, there goes my dreamed-of fortune," I said sadly. "Accompanied by the fading strains of an unplayed wedding march. I'm sorry, Joyce."

"Isn't there one thing you folks are overlooking?" asked Sandy Thomas. "My goodness, you'd think we had lost our last cent just because that little old bag flew away!"

"For your information," I told her, "that is precisely what happened to me. My entire bank account vanished into the wild blue yonder. And some of Pat's money, too."

"But have you forgotten," she insisted, "that we *won* the race? Of course the track officials were a wee bit suspicious when your suitcase took off. But they couldn't prove anything. So they paid me the Gold Stakes prize. If we split it four ways, we all make a nice little profit.

"Or," she added, "if you and Joyce want to make yours a double share, we could split it three ways.

"Or," she continued hopefully, "if Pat wants to, we could make *two* double shares, and split it fifty-fifty?"

From the look in Pat's eyes I knew he was stunned by this possibility. And from the look in hers, I felt she was going to make every effort to take advantage of his bewilderment.

So, as I said before, what this country needs is a good cigar-shaped spaceship. There's a fortune waiting somewhere out in space for the man who can go out there and claim it. Seventy thousand bucks in cold, hard cash.

Indubitatiously!

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the contact cases

by *JOHN NICHOLSON*

Who are these strange extra-terrestials who land only at night, and then in out of the way places?

APPROXIMATELY ten thousand people were expected at last month's Interplanetary Spacecraft Convention near Yucca Valley, California —ten thousand people who had come out to Giant Rock Airport in the California Desert, to hear reports from men who had talked with men "from other worlds" and ridden in the machines generally called Flying Saucers.

What is the truth about these Flying Saucers?

Are they friends—watching over us with increased concern as we experiment with forces that, unleashed, can mean the destruction of a world?

Or are they alien intelligences, waiting and watching, preliminary to an invasion? *Will a Flying Saucer one day attack a man-made Satellite?*

Will spokesmen for the "oldest truths", from Mars, from Venus or from Planet X, step out of a landed Saucer one Sunday morning and bring to us the finite message of World One-ness?

Or is there a more sinister explanation?

John Nicholson is the pseudonym of a writer and editor who has become interested in Ufology and increasingly concerned about the curious pattern of the reported contact cases where golden haired men and women from other planets, resembling us, are said to have met with and talked with and "taught" people all over the country. What do they teach? ..

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WHATEVER the final truth may be, it is obvious that we must agree with Edward J. Ruppelt in his THE REPORT ON UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECTS (Doubleday, 1956) that,— "When a ground radar picks up a UFO target and a ground observer sees a light where the radar target is located, then a jet interceptor is scrambled to intercept the UFO and the pilot also sees the light and gets a radar lock on only to have the UFO almost impudently outdistance him, there is no simple answer. *We have no aircraft on this earth that can at will so handily outdistance our latest* jets." (my italics) (*1)

By now the problem is therefore no longer whether there are any Flying Saucers. The problem is what, and perhaps who they are. There have been too many sightings, too many times when responsible and decidedly hard-headed persons saw these "shapes in the sky" for the question of whether they exist to be dismissed as pure fable. As Ivan T. Sanderson pointed out in his definitive article, AN INTRODUCTION TO UFOLOGY, in this magazine, some months ago,— "If it is all from imagination, we have to start with some editing of the Bible and sundry early Chinese, ancient Egyptian, many medieval and other texts, a drastic revision of a large number of scientific journals, and the immediate censoring of several recognized astronomers, and the prompt suspension from duty of quite a significant percentage of professional airline pilots." (*2)

We are not concerned here, therefore, with whether Saucers are a "myth", and we are not, for that matter, concerned with reported saucer landings and little men, green or otherwise, who have a suspicious talent for frightening people. We are not even concerned with the occasion, in 1950, at a French airfield, when two fifteen foot saucers "with windows around the edge" are said to have hovered just off the ground, and two "normal men" got out to make repairs, briefly answering two questions in French before taking off. (*3) Read further and you may find a possible explanation of this sighting.... And we are not too concerned, here, with retired Brazilian navy Commander Paulo Justino Strauss' theory that "these mysterious engines come from the centre of the Earth, where it has long been believed that life exists to a degree advanced over our own civilization." Commander Strauss believes that these center-of-the-earth based saucers may have been responsible for the disappearance of Colonel Fawcett, in the Amazon jungle, years ago, while Fawcett was searching

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for a legendary city of gold. (*4)

We are concerned here with what are called "contact cases", instances of alleged contacts with extra-terrestials visiting us in these saucers or UFOs.

TAKE the interesting George Van Tassel, Director of the College of Universal Wisdom, a "Non-sectarian and non-profit organization for Para Psycho-Physical Research", and impresario of these annual Spacecraft Conventions in the California Desert. Van Tassel's I RODE A FLYING SAUCER (New Age, 1952) does not actually claim that he did this—that happened later. The pamphlet consists of messages received telepathically by the author and a group of his friends, messages such as the following, (*5)

March 21, 1952— "Greetings. I am Totalmon, 4th projection, 7th wave, space patrol, realms of Schare. Elevation 750 miles above you, speed 170,000 miles per second; returning from the 2nd sector. Our light-cast instructs us to bring you blessings from the Center and the realms of Blaau."

September 21, 1952— "In love and peace I am with you. I am Ashtar, commandant quadra sector station, Schare. We are about to add further confusion to the minds of those who are attempting to diagnose our existence. We are about to be sighted under the surface of the water at many points throughout the oceans of Shan "(The Earth)." You have been given sufficient evidence through the recent storm in your Pacific Ocean, through verification of much information advanced to you by us. My perception is that most of you within this cone have accepted us through proof. All future demonstrations on our part will establish us in the minds of the majority of those doubters throughout this planet Shar. I leave you with my love. I am Ashtar."

Mr. Van Tassel, active in a part of the country that more recently accepted as bona-fide the famous Mon-Ka of Mars tape recordings, records miraculously impressed upon a reel of blank tape in a sealed can, (*6) has founded what can only be described as a cult on the basis of these and later direct contacts, teaching the "truths" revealed to him by his extra-terrestial visitors, "truths" such as the fact that the power utilized by the saucers in their engines is said to be the same as the power, "primary light energy", that keeps the earth moving in its orbit. "In fact, they copied it from the earth." (*7)

The increased number of these direct contact cases, these "slightly incredible" contact cases, to quote Frank

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Edwards, (*8) raises several questions, largely because no contact case has as yet been fully authenticated.

Where do these alien visitors come from?

Truman Bethurum's idyllic Clarion?

Howard Menger's equally idyllic Venus?

Or are they alien psychological warfare agents, exploiting the credulity of the naive and the gullible, as suggested by Ivan T. Sanderson in the course of a recent broadcast? (*9)

Let's turn to Truman Bethurum who had eleven visits with Aura Rhane, the beautiful captain of a flying saucer.

We learn that Mars is beautiful. "Yes, there are people there, just like you and me. The halo you see about the planet is made of air and dust. Mars is a great manufacturing planet. Every home has a beautiful lawn where flowers and shrubs abound; each is a country estate and has five acres of ground. But as for where we live, Clarion, I think man may visit there soon and see our beautiful planet on the other side of the moon, and learn how our government is directed by others and me." (*10)

Aura Rhane describes a wedding on Clarion, the planet on the other side of the moon, in the gardens of an "ancestral castle", the castle built of rarest marbles and exotic woods, the wedding itself uniting "a lovely maiden and the handsome son of our master plumber." The bride "wore a beautiful gown of white satin and lace, and a long trailing veil crowned by a coronet of fragrant blossoms". They would "settle down in a lovely town and enter a business together. The husband will attend to all the outside chores around their home and his wife will manage the home. (*11)

Idyllic—but familiar?

Take life on Utopian Venus—the Venus from which Howard Menger's visitors come.

Wars have been unknown for many years. The people live in complete harmony. Want and poverty are unknown. The spirit of brotherly love prevails. The Venusians are strict vegetarians. While there is little, if any, sickness on Venus, if anyone does fall ill, this is immediately cured by thought projection and prayer. The Venusian life span is 700 to 800 years. Death, to a Venusian, is not a sad event, but a cause for celebration, for "at the moment of death the soul is liberated and transferred to another body." (*12)

Menger, Adamski, Allington, Angelucci, Bethurum and all have been impressed by the spirituality of the Space Men, Menger referring to the similarity of the extra-terrestials he has met to Jesus Christ. (*13) He describes Ve-

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nus as similar to the Garden of Eden, where people live in harmony and peace in their dome shaped houses. The atmosphere is rich and heavy. The sunlight is not seen. They have no streets in our sense of the word, but their vehicles use "magnetic line free power." (*14) In other words, the Venus of Howard Menger is an idyllic world.

But what is a possible explanation for the curious selectivity—as far as contacts are concerned—of these extra-terrestials?

What was the justification for choosing journeyman engineer and welder Truman Bethurum? (*15)

Or Orfeo Angelucci, California aircraft plant worker, author of THE NATURE OF INFINITE ENTITIES with its chapters on "Atomic Evolution, Suspension and Involution", and "Origin of the Cosmic Rays"? (*16)

Or the interesting Mr. George Van Tassel, impresario of these Spacecraft Conventions, visited at isolated Giant Rock Airport in the California desert? (*17)

And Howard Menger, sign painter from Highbridge, New Jersey, who seems so convinced of the truth of what he claims to have seen...

Ivan T. Sanderson, noted scientist, lecturer and TV personality, raised a disturbing possibility in a recent broadcast, pointing out that all of these Contact Cases had certain similarities, that the alleged extra-terrestials only appeared at night, that their craft only landed in out of the way places, and that people had been warned never to approach them carrying weapons *or* flashlights.

These extra-terrestials, speaking from the shadows, preach a doctrine of brotherly love *and urge constantly that we should abandon our experimentation with atom and hydrogen bombs. (*18)*

Who are these occasionally golden-haired men and women who are sometimes glimpsed on the streets, in the factories, in the traffic passing you, or run into the way Bethurum met the beautiful beret-wearing Aura Rhane one day? (*19)

Undoubtedly, as Sanderson points out, "some form of craft have landed here, unknown to the authorities. If any country has developed very fast aeroforms that can go up to the limits of the atmosphere and then descend straight down, these craft could hop over our radar screen. Also there is published evidence, plus personal notes given to me by a former engineer of the Messerschmidt airplane factories in Germany, to the effect that the Russians RIGHT NOW have such a plane or aeroform. This engineer worked on the prototype and actually saw it fly." (*20)

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What is the answer?

Is Ivan Sanderson right?

Or are the men right who are making—not a religion, but a cult—out of the sightings, exploiting our fears and our uncertainties, claiming these extra-terrestials bring us the Final Message, only glimpsed hitherto in Blavatsky and the Yogas?

Are men like Howard Menger and the others right? Have they really spoken with men from Other Planets—these men like Menger whose eyes look off into an unseen distance, and cloud a little, as he begins to tell how Venus is a veritable Garden of Eden... (*21)

Who knows?

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* 1. — pp.314-315. Edward J. Ruppelt, THE REPORT ON UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECTS, 1956. Doubleday

* 2. — Ivan T. Sanderson — An INTRODUCTION TO UFOLOGY — Febr. 1957, **Fantastic Universe**

* 3. — Mentioned in supplement to transcript of speech by Ted Bloecher, Research Director, Civilian Saucer Intelligence of New York, on January 28, 1956. Report is one of a group whose claims to credence are considered "very strong".

* 4. — p.88. January 1956, **The Saucerian Review**, edited by Gray Barker, p. 193. **UFO Newsletter No. 7,** April 1, 1957, issued by North Jersey UFO Group.

* 5. — page 4, **Civilian Saucer Intelligence Newsletter No. 6,** December 15, 1956.

* 6. — page 3, **ibid.**

* 7. — page 7, **ibid**

* 8. — Transcript of speech by Frank Edwards at Civilian Saucer Intelligence Meeting, April 28, 1956

* 9. — "Are Soviet Spies Back of Saucer Contacts?", by Ben Gross. New York **Daily News,** April 4, 1957. A report on Sanderson's discussion of the question on Long John Nebel's program on WOR, "The Party Line"

* 10. — page 85, Truman Bethurum—ABOARD A FLYING SAUCER, 1954, De Vorss Los Angeles

* 11. — pp. 157-158, **ibid**

* 12. — From Jules St. Germain's unpublished memorandum on the Menger case, THE STRANGE AFFAIR AT HIGHBRIDGE

* 13. — **ibid**

* 14. — During discussion on Long John's "Party Line", WOR, Saturday evening, April 13, 1957

* 15. — pages 20-21, Truman Bethurum, **op cit.** Letter signed by Treasurer of Local 12, International Union of Operating Engineers.

* 16. — See Foreword of Orfeo Angelucci's THE SECRET OF THE SAUCERS, Amherst, 1955

* 17. — **Civilian Saucer Intelligence Newsletter No. 6,** Dec. 15, 1957, page 7

* 18. — Ben Gross, **op cit**

* 19. — pages 90-94, Truman Bethurum, **op cit.**

* 20. — Ben Gross, **op cit**

* 21. — During discussion on "Party Line", Saturday evening, April 13, 1957

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the treasure of mars

by LEE CHAYTOR

The treasure of Mars was for Reel, because his heart was kind and his words honest—not like Doc and the others.

THE CREATURE who staggered into Hell's Oven—the Hottest Little Town on Earth: Population 13—might have been human once. Oveners are used to seeing some pretty grim-looking things wander or crawl or creep in off the Badlands. When I first spotted this guy he was headed into town along the main and only street, which used to be the highway before the town got by-passed with the new Super-speedway. He was lurching and dragging his feet as if he was still ankle-deep in desert sand. Right opposite Doc Strood's Medical Center and General Store, the stranger pitched forward onto his face, twitched a couple of times and then lay still.

Everybody in Hell's Oven knows what to do when some poor guy loses a round to the desert. I limped toward the latest victim as fast as was wise in 117 degrees of heat, trying to focus on him as I came; and considering that I was well hung-over for the first time in a year, I didn't do too badly. Tell you the truth, I didn't feel so steady myself, what with Jace Den-

Lee Chaytor, who will be remembered for her sensitive story, UGLY EARTHLING, in our February issue, returns with this startling novelet of what happens to another alien—this time from Mars—who makes the mistake of landing near Hell's Oven, Hottest Little Town on Earth.

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het's sour wino churning inside me, and me needing a shot of Doc's 'medicine' so bad. And I still had to explain the hangover to Clare.

Clare is my boss. She owns the only lunchroom in miles and the only clean motel, and me, if she wants me—which she doesn't seem to. I sometimes feel like telling her that since she saved my life, she has an obligation. Then I look into those deep, steady grey eyes and see the pity in them, and I keep quiet.

Those eyes of hers were the first thing I saw, when I came to on the floor of Clare's lunchroom the day I lost my bout with Ole Man Desert.

"Feeling better now?" Clare was saying, balancing my head in the crook of her warm, soft arm and holding a glass of cool water to my lips.

When I had drunk, "Where am I?" I said. Original thinker, that's me every time.

Clare smiled. "You're in Hell's Oven." Then, reassuringly, "Don't worry. That's just the name of the place. I found you out on the road."

It came back to me. I was Bill Wallbridge, and I was just out of two years in a PO W camp in Korea and my girl hadn't waited and neither had my boss, so I just kept going when I got off the plane—drifting, drinking, losing my job and hitchhiking to a new place... walking to the nearest exit till I dropped, apparently.

I remember I tried to tell Clare some of this—my name and the fact that I needed a job where there weren't many people, when there came a pounding of heavy feet on the porch of the lunchroom and the door slammed open.

So I cringed into a ball right there on the floor. If you have been an uncooperative prisoner and been given the full treatment for two years, it's automatic to protect as many vital organs as you can when the heavy boots come stamping in. Of course Clare couldn't have been aware of my reasons. The big hulk in the doorway didn't care. He just stood there, looselipped and laughing, with his bold small eyes taking me in, and the girl on the floor beside me.

"Playing games?" he said.

Clare rose hastily. She didn't wait for me to speak. "This poor fellow crawled in off the desert. Go and get Doc, will you please, Doubles?"

He didn't answer her for a minute, just stood grinning and watching her till her cheeks got red.

"I asked you to bring the doctor here. This man is ill."

Doubles kept looking at her for a little longer, then he turned without a glance at me and went out of the lunchroom. I tried to get up. Clare's eyes were on me,

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troubled and disappointed. I shrugged. What was the use of trying to explain what two years of the Hole and boots and bamboo canes and maggotty food can do to a man? But there was one thing I had to do. Before this doctor came and went through my stuff.

I reached inside my shirt and fumbled for my wallet. It was gone! Clare followed my gesture. She smiled and took something out of the pocket of her crisp white apron.

"Is this what you're looking for? I found it on the road beside you."

It was my wallet. When I shed my coat the day before, back there in the desert somewhere, I'd evidently had sense enough to transfer my wallet. Now I waved her hand away. "Use the money as long as it lasts, to pay for my keep. But burn the newspaper clippings, will you? I don't want anyone to see them. Not even you."

She frowned a little. I guess she was wondering if I was an escaped criminal. I didn't want her to read those clippings—it might look like a bid for sympathy, and besides, that "hero" stuff didn't fit in with the job of crawling I'd done when the guy Doubles stamped in. Anyway, Clare made up her mind. In my favor.

"No one shall see them. I promise. Now relax till Doc comes," and her firm brown hands were on my arm, gently guiding me to a chair. That's Clare. The money in my wallet didn't last any longer than Doc's first visit—he said I needed shots to kill the pain of the leg the guards broke and didn't bother to set. He asked me how I got all the scars and why I hadn't had my leg attended to, but I didn't say. I wasn't about to cry on anybody's shoulder. When Clare saw where my money went, she offered me a job helping around her place. She didn't like Doc and I think she was afraid of Doubles, but she went against their advice and hired me.

She's been paying me more than I'm worth to do the cleanup jobs around the lunchroom and the motel. I sweep Doc's store out and run errands for him, too. He's got an eye for cheap labor, and besides he wanted to sell me some more shots of that medicine that killed the pain and made me forget. So I got what I wanted when I started drifting—easy work, no need to think, no need to talk to people. I limped around in the clear quiet heat of the little desert town, and kept out of Doubles' way and fell in love with a girl who pitied me.

Until lately, I was contented enough. Then Doc began to raise his price for the medicine I was spending my

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wages on, and without it, I began to lay awake nights with the pain gnawing on my leg. It got so bad that a couple of nights ago I bartered my watch for a jug of Jace Denhet's home brew. Jace owns the garage where Doubles works. I'd been sleeping it off in a shed behind the garage—having sense enough not to let Clare see me like that. I knew I'd have some explaining to do to Clare, but right now all I wanted was a barrel of water to drink and soak my head in. And right then—as I stood weaving in the hot afternoon sunlight,—was when I spotted the character staggering in off the desert.

I thought I knew how the guy felt, having done the same thing myself, so I made my way toward him where he sprawled in the road. He was game, give him credit. As I came up to him, he pulled his face up off the road and began to crawl forward on his hands and knees. Right then, I began to like him. You have to respect a guy who won't give up.

I bent over to pick him up—and got my first shock. In all that heat, this character had on a fur coat! I shook my head to clear it and only blurred my eyes worse. Maybe he'd bailed out of one of those high-flying experimental jobs. Pilots have to wear some funny-looking suits to protect them from the cold and speeds. It figured. There was a big box like a walkie-talkie on his back. I went on my knee to scoop him up in my arms—he was a little guy. Second shock.

He came up like when you heave on a full barrel and it turns out to be empty. I almost reared over backwards. Then I got a look at his face. Third and worst shock. If I'd seen that mug last night, I'd have sworn off, sure. His skin was a shiny bronze with purple undertones like bruises all over it. It was drawn skull-tight, so tight that the lipless mouth pulled away from his teeth and his nose was two round holes. His eye-sockets were perfectly round and sunken.

I closed my own eyes and swayed a little. The motion seemed to revive my passenger. From somewhere inside that barrel chest came a humming sound, aimless, vaguely pleasant; and then—

"Hic!"

"Brother, you're tight!" I muttered, trying to grin. I sure must have been soaked, for my *hallucinations* to be drunk!

"What have you got there, Bill?" Doc Strood's voice cut at me. I hunched my shoulders. I still can't control that wince. When you've been trained to jump or get a rifle butt on the instep, you jump. And Doc's voice is the coldest thing this side of North Korea. He comes up so quiet-

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ly behind you, you never do hear him. Add to that, he owns the only store in two hundred miles and the only drug dispensary— and he believes in making his investments pay. He charges three hundred percent for everything, and dilutes the drugs so the Indians and Mexicans have to mortgage their lives to him when their kids get sick. That's a picture of Doc Strood, the self-constituted boss of Hell's Oven.

"Answer me, you bum! I asked you what you've got there."

My hackles rose at the tone of his voice. I straightened up with the frail creature light in my arms. I didn't say a word—just let him look at what I held.

Strood bent over. His mouth fell open. "Wha-a-" He swallowed. "Goddlemighty," he whispered. "What is it?"

"Junior here just crawled in from the desert," I said.

"What in—what's the matter with him?" Doc backed away.

"Looks like he's had too much sun. Why don't you take him into your back room —pardon me, Medical Center —and examine him? It's probably not catching. If you're worried about your fee, you can sell his fur coat for enough to cover the bill."

Doc glanced at me sideways, decided to ignore the impudence, and nodded toward the store. "Get him inside and we'll see what we're up against." He couldn't bear the thought of losing a fee. Even when it came wrapped in a package like that one.

By the time Doc had finished his examination, we were both feeling queer. Doc poured himself a stiff shot. He didn't offer me one. I didn't really want a drink. Maybe it was the smell— faint, acrid, not unpleasing but *different*—coming from the thing on the cot.

"My God," Doc wiped his slack lips, "what *is* it?"

The fur coat was joined on. It was his own hair, large hollow strands with feathery fluff at the ends. It was a magnificent reddish-brown pelt such as I'd never seen on any animal. It grew over his head and down his neck and all over his big-chested body. His hands were long and had four slender, flexible 'fingers'. His eyes—well, he hadn't opened them yet, and I for one was in no hurry for the unveiling.

There was a sort of woven fibre harness around his hips, with a heavy pouch dangling from it. The thing which had been strapped on his back was most interesting. It looked vaguely like a walkie-talkie, with a slender glass rod stuck out a little and a series of glassy tiles like a keyboard along one side. Doc's nicotine-stained fingers hovered over those

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keys and then pulled back. He raised his eyes and caught me grinning.

"Might be a bomb, or something," he snarled. Then, leaning forward to peer at the heavy pouch—"Wonder what's in that bag?"

"His knitting?" I suggested. I couldn't understand myself. For nearly a year now I had cringed before Doc, willing to run his errands and take his abuse so I could be sure of getting shots of the dope he sold me as 'medicine'. But today, somehow, I felt like spitting in his eye. The sight of his yellow-stained fingers fumbling at the guy's wallet made me mad—a good, strong, clear-headed anger I hadn't felt in a long time. "Why don't you leave the pouch alone, Doc? It might blow up in your face." I hope, I added in my mind.

Doc favored me with a mean look. "You're gettin' mighty cocky for a hobo, ain't you? You open the thing, if you're so smart. Maybe it'll tell us who he is."

I bent over the unconscious figure and examined the bulging pouch carefully without touching it. The fibre was woven so closely it presented a solid surface. I couldn't spot any opening. Something made me look up. The disc-shaped eyes were red. They were trained on me as steadily as a gun.

"Hi," I said, weakly.

There was a strained silence.

"Welcome," I said, "to our fair city. Hell's Oven. And from the look of you, you ought to feel right at home."

"Shut up, you fool!" hissed Doc. "Do you want to get him mad at us?" He moved backward. The red disc eyes left me and followed Doc. It was a relief. I hunkered down beside the cot, partly because I couldn't stand up. The eyes finished with Doc and came back to me. The lipless mouth opened.

"Hiiiiiiii," it breathed.

I grinned and stuck out my hand. "Shake, fella."

He looked at my hand, then at my face. Slowly, as if it weighed a ton, he lifted his own hand and stretched it out to mine. I clasped it gently. The bones felt very small and soft.

"Feeling better?" I asked.

The red eyes indicated the keyboard box and returned to mine. I lifted the box and held it close to his hands. With an effort, he stretched up his fingers and pressed several keys. There was a scuttling sound and a slam as Doc lit out.

Then the strange thing happened. The guy on the cot pressed down on those glassy keys and inside my head I heard something—or saw something—or felt something, I'm still not quite sure which. First there was a feeling of friendliness. Then the

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sound *Laal,* like a name. Over and over.

"Laal," I repeated. "That's you, isn't it? Laal."

I sensed a feeling of relief as though he were saying, *good. Now we can talk.* Then a questioning: *You?*

"My name? I'm nobody—just the town bum."

Rejection. Question.

"Son of a gun," I breathed. "What is that gadget, a lie detector? All right, then. I'm William Wallbridge, *Bill* to you. A returned prodigal from Korea. I sold my birthright to a mess named Strood, and now I have to bake in it—the Oven, I mean. Just a no good junky. Ask anybody." I was talking too much. I stopped.

"Hi," said my pal on the cot. "Hi, Beel."

I liked that guy!

"Where you from, Laal?" I asked softly. He seemed so vulnerable lying there, with Doc and Doubles and Jace hovering around outside like buzzards. I didn't want them to get him like they got me.

His slender fingers pressed more keys. I didn't hear a darn thing, but inside my head a picture started moving: a planet smaller than Earth...reddish-brown, white capped. A group of people like Laal, gathered in a softly-shining circular room without windows, bending anxiously over the bodies of two smaller editions of themselves. The kids were sick, I could see that. They looked even worse than Laal.

"What's the matter with them?" I whispered.

Discouragement .... weary non-comprehension....then a tentative groping....virus? Once there was a cure for such things—a mold from the swamp-scum which healed sickness. But the last of the swamps dried up centuries ago...and they had lost the secret of producing the molds artificially.

A search—frantic, planet-wide. No luck. More small Laals dying. A desperate, last-ditch effort: an air-boat, null-gravity, such as Laal's people used for their pleasure, hastily fitted with glassy-metal plates and shields like armor. Food for a long journey, in the pouch. And in the very heart of the ship, most carefully girdered and cushioned, a huge shining globe filled with the greatest treasure of the planet.

Then Laal, crowding into the improvised space-ship, into the hammock-type seat. An injection. Take-off. Space. A landing on the next planet, of course on a desert area much like the home world. But the air, different. Full of something which stole Laal's wits.

"Oxygen," I said. "You're on an oxygen bender, boy."

Now Laal's fingers flying over the keys, faster, faster. His thoughts beating urgence against my mind.

"Beel, help me. Help my

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people. Your world rich in swamps. Surely there must be, somewhere, the substance I need. I was hypno-trained from the data in the ancient records, to recognize the molds when I see them. But I must have help. On your world I am weak, slow. Everything is so heavy. If you help me, I will pay you well. In my ship, great treasure, the wealth of my people, hoarded to buy the cure for our children's sickness. Will you help, Beel?"

I got up and stood over him, gently lifting the heavy brain — impulse — transformer out of his frail arms. "Sure, I'll try to help you, Laal. But we don't want your treasure. I'll get you to a big town, good doctors. They'll know more about what you need. Sounds to me like one of the sulphas or penicillin, but they'll know. I'll drive you there right now!"

As I talked, I got more excited. "I'll borrow the car from Clare—that's Miss Evans. She'll be glad to help. But listen." I stared down into his glowing eyes. "While I'm gone, play it dumb. Don't tell Doc or anybody else anything about your treasure. You see, Laal, there are different kinds of people on our world, and some of these characters around here are definitely the wrong kind."

A big animal laugh boomed out from directly behind me. "Now, that ain't very friendly of you, Billyboy. Not a bit friendly." And two hands like a gorilla's closed gently around my throat and then began to tighten slowly into a vice and squeezed until the world blacked out. I remember thinking, as I passed out, that Doc hadn't lost any time rounding up his cronies, Doubles and Jace.

When I came to, I was lying in a corner where, presumably, Doubles had thrown me. The room was dark except for a shaded bulb over the cot, and foul with cigar smoke; but I could still smell the acrid taint of Laal through the reek. Jace Denhet's smooth deep voice was asking a question. My flesh crawled. Except for the heat, it could have been an interrogation in the prison camp. I shook my head to clear it. It seemed like a long time since I had had a shot of Doc's nerve medicine! I listened.

"You talked to Bill. Why won't you talk to us? We overheard Bill telling you not to tell us about your treasure, but you don't want to pay any heed to him. He's just a drunken bum who hangs around my garage and Doc's drug store, cadging drinks."

"A most unreliable person," added Doc, in his best company voice. "Now, be reasonable—uh—sir. Tell us what we want to know and we'll give you a drink and something to eat."

"Aw, nuts!" growled Doubles. "Why doncha let me choke him a little, like I did

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Billyboy? That little thin neck of his is just askin' to be squeezed."

"You stupid fool! If you hadn't choked Bill so hard, we'd have him to talk for us to the freak—however he managed."

"Sure you could make him tell you what he found out?" It was Jace's voice.

"It's been quite a while since I gave him any dope. Now the likker's worn off, he ought to be crawling to me for a shot any time. And then we'll find out where this freak cached his treasure."

"If Billyboy don't come to soon, I'm game to try a few tricks on Ugly," Doubles licked his lips.

I drew in a deep breath. The only thing I wanted now was to get out of this shadowed, smoke-filled room, with its cone of light stabbing down on the helpless victim. I might have made it, too. The room was dark and they were all concentrating on the figure on the cot. Laal. The little leathery freak who had learned to say, "Hi, Beel," and shaken my hand. He'd said, "Help me." And I had answered, "yes."

And now Doc and Doubles and Jace were gathered around Laal and I knew them ....knew the depths of cruelty they were capable of.

Maybe I was confusing them with some other men in a shadowed room with a bright light beating down. I struggled to my feet groggily.

"You'll never get anything from Laal," I said. "I've told him what nasty men you are, and that he isn't to play with you. I'm his legal guardian and keeper. You know—finders keepers. As in treasure."

They had turned and were staring at me in the light of the shaded bulb. If I could have willed myself dead in that moment, I would have. On the three faces was dawning a wolfish smile I had seen before. Doubles advanced on me through the smoke.

"Well, if it ain't Billyboy, come back to life. I got a bone to pick with you. One of yours, that is." His guffaw boomed out.

"Don't touch him till I tell you!" snapped Doc. "What good is he if you keep knocking him out?"

"Bring him over here in the light, Doubles," said Jace gently. "Doc, go get him a shot of your 'medicine'."

On the way out, Doc turned on another light. I pushed past Doubles, grinding my heel over his toes as I went. The pain jolted an oath out of him and he swung toward me. I jabbed my elbow into his middle. He came at me, clawing, his eyes popping.

"Hold it!" Jace cautioned him. "Let him alone till Doc gets back."

The big bruiser literally shook with fury. Behind his teeth was a spate of searing rage, but he held it after one

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glance at Jace; held it and grew quiet. Too quiet.

Well, I'd successfully diverted their attention from Laal. Why? I sneaked a glance at the weird little alien, met the unflinching stare of the red-disc eyes. He was counting on me to pull something out of the bag to help him. Suddenly—whether it was the hang-over, or the lack of dope, or the crazy impossible situation—I felt like laughing. Why *did* I care about this screwy little Martian monkey?

"Not your shining hair, Dear, Not your eyes of blue—no, red—", I paraphrased an old song. Jace cursed softly...

"He's gone completely off the beam."

Doubles regarded me doubtfully. "Doc musta put too much dope in the dope—"

They stared at me, frowning. I grinned back at them foolishly. Nothing seemed to matter. Clare was the only decent thing in my world, and God knew I wasn't fit to touch her. So why not go to bat for the little man from wherever? I called Doubles a nasty name, and laughed to see his face. Then nausea swept me, and dizzyness like a black whirling cloud. I swayed on my feet.

"Catch him," said Jace.

"—way ahead of you," muttered Doubles, hands huge and tight on my arms. The big fingers pressed tighter....

"Put him down, Doubles," ordered Jace. "You'll get your chance."

"Damn right," said Doubles and led me to a chair beside Laal's cot.

Doc bustled in with a hypo filled with something cloudy. My nerves jumped. I could *feel* the jab and then the flame along my nerves and then the peace...As though they belonged to somebody else, I saw my hands stretching out, trembling, toward the hypo. I hadn't even realized that I had moved. I pulled my arms back to my sides, but their faces told me they had seen the gesture.

"The whole thing's for you, Bill. Just the moment you tell us where the little freak's treasure is." Doc waved the hypo toward me, his eyes behind their glasses seemed to be getting bigger and bigger. The hypo, too—bigger... more desirable...I was reaching out—

Doubles chuckled. "I sure wish Miss Clare could see him now. Her prize reformed bum, crawlin' for a shot of Doc's dope."

A second time my arms fell to my sides. I managed a shaky grin. "Thanks, Doubles. Doc nearly made it that time."

Doc snarled at Doubles. Jace had to step between them. Doc glared at them both. "Can't you keep that blood-hungry moron quiet? Get him out of here!"

"We might need him, if

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Bill's going to be stubborn," said Jace gently. Doubles smiled like a hyena. One huge fist slapped into the other palm.

"Any time, Boss. Any time."

And then Laal spoke. Really spoke, with his own reedy breathless voice. None of us understood him, but we sure tried hard. At the end, he gestured toward the talk-box and back to himself, urgently. There was no mistaking his meaning.

"No, Laal! No! They'll take your treasure and—"

Doubles' big hand was across my mouth, pulling my head against his shoulder, the other hand gripping my body. Doc hurried to lift the box and place it on the cot beside Laal. Thin alien fingers flickered on the glassy keys. A soundless throbbing pressed against my ear-drums, filled my head. The others, open-mouthed, were straining to catch that silent speech.

Inside my head I began to picture the desert just outside Hell's Oven. It was like a movie unrolling in front of your eyes. It made me dizzy. I closed my eyelids but the picture went on unreeling against the back of them. Across the desert. It seemed a long way. Topping a dune finally, we seemed to stare down into a curiously-rounded hollow. At the base of the depression squatted a shining ball. Laal's ship. A round dark opening yawned in one side.

"That is my ship," confirmed Laal's thought. "Within it, great wealth. The rarest treasures of my planet, yours in exchange for the cure of our children. Do you have this mold-medicine, Being-known-as-Doc? It is a golden mold from which can be distilled a healing fluid."

Doc was staring hypnotized at the red-disc eyes. Laal stared back at him, waiting for an answer. Doc took a step forward, raised his voice as though talking to a deaf man. He said eagerly, "Yes! Yes! I have the medicine you want. Let us go at once and collect the treasure!"

"First, the cure." You could hear the sternness of Laal's thought echoing hollow inside your ears. I wrenched convulsively at the vise gripped around my chest. Doubles only held tighter, grinding his palm so my mouth bled against my teeth.

"What sickness have they got?" Doc was breathing like a man who's run a long way. Maybe he'd seen further into Laal's ship than I had, estimated the value of the spoils of a world; he was shaking with excitement.

Laal pressed the keys rapidly. Another picture formed behind my eyes—this time a close-up of a tiny figure, disc-eyes covered by a whitish membrane, swollen lumps on either side of the thin neck. Doc drew back a

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little, frowning. He pursed his lips.

"The way I see it, from what you—uh—tell me, it looks like mumps," he muttered. Then he put on a greasy smile. "Yessir, mumps is all that's the matter with your kiddies. And it just so happens I have the very cure for that, right here in the dispensary. I'll make you up a couple of jugs of it right away."

The red eyes went from Doc to me and back again. Laal's next thought held stern anxiety: "From the mind of Beel, my friend, I sense strong doubt of your good faith and ability to help me."

"*Aureomycin*!" crowed Doc his glasses twinkling in triumph as he looked from one to the other of us. "That yellow mold stuff he was talking—thinking about, rang a bell with me. 'Member all that aureomycin I laid in when the Cantala family and those Indians got the spotted fever? They couldn't pay for it so I still got most of it. Rocky Mountain spotted fever's a virus, ain't it? And so's mumps. What's good for one ought to be good for the other."

"That's weeks ago," I protested mentally. "Laal, make dead sure the stuff's still active—or whatever."

Laal's thought challenged Doc as the little alien pressed the keyboard. "Let me see this golden medicine from a mold. I would know, from my conditioning, whether it is the thing we are seeking."

Doc was fairly dancing with excitement. "I've got a fair plenty of the stuff. You can dilute it down and make enough to cure everybody!" His smile widened. "Doubles, here's the key to the shed. Get me a couple of five gallon cans. Jace, bring over your work jeep and we'll load the medicine and drive our friend back to his ship. I'll be making up the mixture while you're gone."

I tried to think. Laal had said a golden mold. I'd heard of aureomycin—who hadn't? But was it a cure for what ailed the Martian children? And surely dilution would ruin it. Or would it? My indecision let the moment pass. Doubles was pulling me toward the door.

"What'll I do with Billyboy? Wring his neck? We don't need him any more."

"Of course, you're joking, Doubles," Doc's eyes shifted warningly in Laal's direction. "We'd never harm any of our—servants, no matter how wilful or unreliable they are. Just take him out and put him in the shed." He shot a venomous glance at me. "You might make sure he's *comfortable* before you leave him."

Doubles was overcome by the humor of this. "I'll tuck him in, Doc. Real comfortable." He threw his massive arm around my shoulders and pulled me out the door.

Jace followed us into the darkness. "I'll bring the jeep to the back door," he whis-

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pered. "We don't want anyone seeing the freak and getting ideas. And it'll be easier to load Doc's cans of medicine."

"What's he going to give the freak? What is the cure for mumps, anyways?"

"There isn't any, so far's I've ever heard. And I wouldn't bet on any diagnosis of Doc's, myself." Jace shrugged. "What do you care? If the freak comes back mad, he'll take it out on Doc, not us. We didn't say it was mumps—we didn't guarantee any sure cures. And in the meantime, we got our share of the loot stashed away—" He interrupted himself, "Wait a minute! I got an idea..." His voice lowered cautiously.

"After we get the treasure from the freak and he takes off in his flying saucer or whatever it is, we'll help Doc load the stuff on the jeep. And then I think Doc better have an accident—a bad one. He's been cracking the whip pretty hard on poor old Bill, here, lately. Clare and two-three others have mentioned it to me. It's only natural that a big guy like Bill won't take that kind of pushing around forever—especially when he gets a few under his belt." His soft insinuating voice paused. "If he had a gun—"

Doubles took up the plan joyfully. "So tonight Billyboy objects. He steals a gun somewhere. And we find him standing over the body of poor, harmless old Doc with the murder weapon in his fist. Naturally, I shoot him down before he can finish the rest of us." He shook his head admiringly. "I got to hand it to you, Jace."

"Think you can handle it?"

"It's my pleasure," grinned Doubles. "Where's the gun?"

Jace passed him something. "Here's Doc's. I just happened to pick it up a while ago, inside."

Doubles stuffed it in his coat pocket. "Should I put Billyboy out of his misery now?"

Jace hesitated. I held my breath. Then he said, "Better not. Someone might come to investigate the shooting. I don't want witnesses to any of this. And I don't want to give Doc any ideas. Or disturb the freak. He seems to have taken quite a shine to Bill."

"Freaks of a feather—" said Doubles with a snort of laughter. "Speaking of our friend Bill, what's with him? He's been awful quiet." He shook me roughly. I swayed, letting my muscles relax. He pulled me erect.

"Naw, there ain't no fight in him. What with that rotgut we sold him and the dope Doc's been pumping into him, it's a wonder he's still with us. Must've been made of iron to take it for this long."

Jace wasn't interested "He's just a wreck—a drifter.

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We're wasting time. Sure you know what you've got to do? *After* the stuff is loaded in the jeep. We might as well have help with it. First, Doc. Then Bill."

"Got it," said Doubles.

"Now take Doc his five gallon cans or he'll be out here looking for them." Jace moved away noiselessly in the darkness.

Doubles shifted his grip to a carrying position under my shoulder. I let him drag me through the sand and rubbish toward the rear of the store. Doc had a large locked shed out there, where he kept everything he couldn't sell or use. Doubles propped me roughly against the shed wall as he fumbled with the padlock. I sucked in a careful, noiseless breath. This had to be good the first time. I didn't have more than one punch in me. I shuffled my feet to get a firm stance in the gritty soil, and I let that first breath out easy and took another. The night air was sharp and pungent with sage.

Doubles was bent over, peering and muttering over the padlock. I brought my hand down on his neck in a chopping cut that had everything I had left in it.

He slumped to the ground. I bent over him, fumbling for the gun, and nearly fell on my face as I got it. I thrust it between my skin and the cord that held up my pants, pulling my shirt out over it to hide it. I leaned against the dry, splintery wood of the shed for a moment, hauling in another breath; then, shaking and sweating, I bent and finished opening the padlock.

It took me a couple of minutes to get Doubles dragged inside the shed. It was dark in there, sour-smelling and unbelievably hot. I bruised my hands on sharp corners and ragged edges I couldn't see, as I pulled at boxes and crates to make a clear space behind them. I got Doubles into that and piled some empty oil cans on top of him.

I staggered out the door into the dim light of the rising moon. It took a lot of fumbling to get the padlock back after Doubles' rough surgery, but at last it was locked into place. I threw the key as far away as I could, then I leaned against the shed and gulped in the air and tried to control the deep shuddering convulsions of my stomach muscles.

The back door came open a little, spilling a streak of yellow light across the sand like a finger pointing at me. Doc's mean little frame was silhouetted black in the doorway, his head thrust forward into the night.

"Doubles!" came his sharp whisper. "What's keeping you? Get those cans in here!"

I lurched toward him, pulling out the gun as I came. I was nearly at the door before

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he saw who I was. He fell back, mouthing something. Then he turned and darted away.

I let him go. Hanging in the doorway, I didn't have strength to run after him. I had to get the little alien away from here and out to civilization where he could tell his story and get real help for his people. I went over to the cot. Laal's eyes were closed. He looked worse than ever, if that was possible. I shook him as gently as I could. His fur was soft and pleasant to the touch. His eyes opened. I swear I saw something like friendly recognition in that grotesque mask. I put the thought-transformer beside him and lifted his fingers to the keys. He pressed them obediently.

"I've got to talk to you, Laal. These men are bad. They want the treasure you've got in your ship. I'm going to try to get you to a place where good men will try honestly to find a cure for your children. But you've got to help yourself a little. I don't think I can carry you—"

Laal was pressing a single key. *Negative.*

"You mean you can't travel?"

His thought came: "I need not go from this place. The medicine I seek is here. The Being-called-Doc has said it."

I sagged against the cot. Now what did I do? In a few minutes Doc would be back, with Jace, probably, and a gun. I began to shake with anger at my own weakness and Laal's stubborn idiocy. Even though I knew he was reading my thoughts, I shouted at him,

"Look, you dope, can't you understand? Those guys haven't *got* a cure! Or if they have, there isn't enough of it! I know Doc. He'll water it down to look like plenty, and that'll ruin it! They're going to trick you and take your treasure and kill me—" I stopped. Laal's eyes had closed. His fingers slipped from the keys. He just wasn't interested in anything I had to say.

I rubbed my shaking fingers across the dirty stubble of beard on my scarred face. I had to admit I wasn't a very convincing figure. So why not just forget the whole crusade? Search for some of Doc's medicine and shoot myself so full of it that I wouldn't come to for a week. My body, craving the peace of the drug, urged me toward the cluttered dispensary. But something held me. I looked down at the thing on the cot. It was alien and completely ugly. It had rejected me and my offers of help and my advice. I stared at my hands. They were bleeding a little. I tried to think.

Clare! Maybe she could convince Laal. She'd tried hard enough to help me, and

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I wasn't much better looking than Laal. And she had a car. I staggered out the door and started off for Clare's lunchroom. I kept to the shadow of the buildings. No need to risk running into Jace or Doc in the dark. When I got to Clare's, light was streaming from the windows. I pushed open the door and nearly fell into the room.

"Bill!" Clare's voice, troubled and—afraid. Of me? I focused my eyes with an effort. Beside Clare stood Doc and Jace, waiting for me to speak. My throat and mouth were dry. I stood there, gaping. Doc came forward, light glowing on his glasses so I couldn't see the eyes behind them.

"You see, Clare?" Oh, that oily voice! "It's like I said. He got hold of some drink somewhere and he's gone over the line. You'd better let Jace and me handle him." He shook his head in mock pity, the hypocritical old buzzard. "I think it'd be kinder if we take him to the city tonight. I've tried to help him, but I can't do much for his kind, here." He sighed.

Unctious rotten devil! I worked my mouth. "Clare!" It came out a choking gasp. "I've got to tell you—tell—"

"Yes, Bill?" So soft her voice, so kind. And her clear eyes troubled as they usually were when they rested on me. "What are you trying to tell us, Bill?"

So what could I say? I looked from one to the other of them,—Clare anxious, Doc smiling, Jace imperturbable. Could I say, "There's a Martian in the back of Doc's drug store...and Doc is selling him ten gallons of sheep dip as a cure for mumps... and the little man is going to give Doc a world's ransom in return." Well, could I? Just about then, Clare would join Doc in a call for the boys in the white coats.

I had to try. I don't know why, I just had to. But first I wanted a drink of water. I'd need to talk fast and smooth, once I started, and this strangled gasping wouldn't take me far. So I tried again.

"Drink—something to drink—"

It was the wrong thing to say. I knew that as soon as I caught the pain in Clare's eyes, and the beginning of a reluctant belief—and the gleam of triumph on Doc's face.

"You see, my dear? He's quite hopeless—"

So it was up to me alone. I pulled Doc's gun out of my belt. "Gun you gave Doubles to kill Doc 'n' me, Jace," I croaked. "Loaded. Let's go Martian. You too, Clare. Witness."

Reluctantly they went ahead of me down the dark, deserted street. I think the men knew I'd be happy to kill them both. Clare was at my elbow. Once when a wave of dizzyness threatened to

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sweep me out into the dark, her hand came up, strong and steady, under my arm. I only needed it for a minute. Then the curtain lifted and I could see again. Doc and Jace had stopped walking and were peering back at us.

"Move!" I croaked. They obeyed. I was right behind them with the gun jammed tight into Jace's back as we entered Doc's store.

Someone was moving around in the lighted dispensary. We headed that way. Doc and Jace went first, then me, with Clare following. I heard her quick indrawn breath. Laal did look like something unholy as he crouched on the floor, the single dangling bulb reflecting red from his fur, his lean leathery arms scrabbling a bunch of cardboard cartons into a pile in the centre of the cheap cot blanket. His red eyes burned up at us. His hands flashed to the keyboard. His thought came to us all, clearly.

"I have found the substance I need. It was here, as Doc said, a culture from a mold, even as also our ancient writings described. Now you must help me to my ship with your vehicle. My time is short and your gravity defeats me."

"Get the jeep, Clare. I'll hold these babies till you come back."

"You can't go like that!" shrilled Doc, stepping forward. "You've taken all my aureomycin and the sulphas...You can't go away without paying!"

Laal turned red eyes on him. "I will leave the treasure on the sand beside my ship as I promised," came his thought. "Bill can bring them back to you."

"Like hell he will," snarled Jace. "He'll run out with the works. Why should he split with us?"

Laal looked at him wearily. "What do I know of your quarrels?" his fingers pressed the keys. "I have the cure; I give you my treasure. Divide it among you. There is no more."

Doc whimpered and Jace fixed me with dark hating eyes. "How did you get Doubles?"

I didn't answer. We waited. How long would it take Clare to bring up the jeep? The deep uncontrollable trembling was starting up again inside me; nausea was sour in my throat. I noticed Doc's eyes on me, greedily searching for signs of collapse. I tightened my grip on the gun.

"If I feel myself going, I'll shoot Jace first and then you," I promised him. Nobody answered me. In the silence we heard the jeep pull up beside the back door. Clare came in.

"Give Laal a hand out to the jeep," I told her.

He wouldn't let go of his bundle of medicine, so Clare half-carried him outside. Doc

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swayed forward as they disappeared. I swung the gun on him and he froze. I guess my face would have been enough to stop him. More than anything in this world except helping Laal, I craved a chance to shoot him. Jace had ordered my death—but Doc had kept me in a living hell of craving for the drug that degraded me more than the "corrections" of the prisoner of war camp had been able to do...

I backed toward the door. Now their eyes were following me, watching for a misstep, a stumble...I had to laugh. The sound of it, ringing out crazily, sobered me. Just a little longer, long enough to help Laal on his way to the stars and see Clare safe—and then I'd come back and kill them both.

A message from Laal, fainter than any I'd received: "My time grows short! Hurry!"

I heard the jeep's engine as I backed out the door. I was at the end of my strength. I couldn't risk trying to tie Doc and Jace up...they were advancing slowly after me... they'd be on me the moment I turned my back. I stretched out my left hand and caught the door knob.

"I'll shoot the first one who comes through this door," I said, and slammed it in their faces. For good measure I sent one shot crashing through the panel.

In a second I was falling into the jeep. Clare almost swung it out from under me as she whirled toward the road. I can't remember much about that ride. I sat hunched and swaying in the seat beside Clare. Behind me on the floor Laal huddled over his precious bundle of drugs. Dully I hoped he wouldn't get anything broken by the jolting, as the jeep bumped and rocked over the dunes, heading out into the desert in the light of the full moon.

Clare stared straight ahead of her, guided like an automaton by Laal's mind. It seemed like a long trip, and then the jeep was laboring up the side of a big dune, topping it, and rolling down into a bowl-shaped depression which looked familiar. At the very centre was a shining ovoid. Laal's ship.

Between us, Clare and I got him out of the jeep and over to the opening. He kept his stranglehold on the cot blanket full of drugs, every second. I can't say I blame him; he'd come a long way to get them. There was a shimmering curtain of some sort over the entrance port. Laal focussed his box and pressed the key. There was a high whine and the curtain dissolved. Clare, being smaller, helped Laal through the dark opening. As I stood there, watching, I heard a droning roar. A car—coming across the desert at a spine-jarring speed. Doc and Jace hadn't wasted any time.

I felt for the gun. Some-

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where during the ride I had lost it.

What would they do to Clare? I staggered over the fused sand to the ship's port. "Clare! See if Laal will take you up and drop you off near a city." It sounded silly even as I was saying it. Clare appeared in the opening, a small box under her arm. She stepped out, turned, waved back at Laal, then came toward me. Her eyes were alight with a happiness I'd never seen in them.

"He—explained things to me, Bill. About you—things he'd read in your mind. He thinks very highly of you. And he wants to say goodbye."

"Clare," I groaned, "hear that car? It's Doc and Jace. I don't think they'll let either of us out of this alive ... *Get going, Laal!*" I yelled.

As though in answer, a humming came from within the ovoid and a pale blue radiance began to glow in the air around it. That was all we needed—to put up a neon sign advertising the whereabouts of Laal's ship! As I bent to go through the port, the powerful spotbeam on Jace Denhet's tow truck was lighting up the rim of the bowl like a dreadful sunrise.

I went on in. Laal was strapped into a hammock-sling of woven fibres. Pulsing in front of him was a globe of bluish light. Off in the shadows loomed a couple of machines larger than Laal's talk-box with many rows of glassy keys. Laal was holding out a tiny box to me. It was made of the same shining substance as the ship. In the bluish light it shone like mother-of-pearl.

"This is for you, Beel," his thought came warmly. "Because your heart is kind and your words are honest. I have been glad to know you, man of another world."

What could I say? "Me, too, Laal," I managed. "I hope your kids get better."

There was a tangle of voices outside. Doc's weasel face thrust inside the port. He had a gun in his fist.

"Where's the treasure you promised me?"

Laal touched the keys. Into our minds came the image of a shining sphere behind us. Doc and I turned to look. Sure enough, there it was—a huge globe of shining metal carefully cradled in a net of tough fibre.

"It is our world's greatest treasure. All my people—and we are many hundred—denied themselves for a year to collect this as a payment for the cure. Take it; roll it from the ship now, Being-called-Doc. I have but waited for your arrival; my ship must take off within a hand's count of time." The hum grew louder; the blue light brightened. As we looked, the port irised open wide enough to permit the removal of the shining globe.

Doc called Jace. Between

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them they jostled and rolled the globe out onto the desert sands and away from the ship. It seemed very heavy. Doc ran and poked his head inside the ship again. "Is that all you've got?"

Laal's reply came: That is my world's wealth. Our rarest treasure. Be content. Beel, use wisely the gift I gave you. It is time for you to come out of the shadows of the past and live in the light again. May the Great Ones watch over you,—my friend! Farewell."

The port was slowly closing. I got out just in time. Clare caught my arm and pulled me away from the ship. It rose on a shaft of bright blue flame—flame without heat. Our skins tingled. We moved further back. Laal's ship dwindled skyward. Then, like a pinwheel, blue flame swept around it in a flaring circle and the ship flashed out of sight.

I sat down on the sand. I couldn't have stood up any longer. Clare sank down beside me, rested her head on my shoulder. It felt right, I looked at Doc and Jace. They were glaring at each other.

"I'm rich! I'm the richest man in the world!" crowed Doc. He was still holding the gun.

"There's plenty for both of us," said Jace. "Give me the gun. I'll take the boxes he gave Clare and Bill."

"I'll hold the gun," Doc spoke with enormous good humor, "you get the stuff from them."

Jace came toward us cautiously. "How'd you like to buy your lives? Just give us what the alien gave you, and we'll let you go."

Clare didn't say anything. She just leaned against me, cradling her box and looking off into the moonlit desert as though this were some ordinary evening and we were an ordinary pair of sweethearts. Jace came a little closer, stooped over us, hands out. There was a sharp crack. Jace straightened a little, then toppled into my lap. I eased him over onto the sand.

Doc was laughing. "Thought I'd forget you planned to gun me down, you and Doubles! Thought you'd share my treasure, did you?" A drool of saliva from his mouth threaded silver in the moonlight. I guess he was crazy. "All mine," he crooned. "I just have to shoot you two and this treasure is all mine."

I was too tired to be scared any more. I looked at the queerly-smiling face. "How you going to get the stuff back to Hell's Oven?" I asked. "It's too heavy for you to lift into the truck."

He stopped smiling and his face quivered like a child's—an evil child's. "That's so... but you'll help me...you and Clare... Maybe I won't kill Clare if you help me."

It took both Clare and me to get the globe on the truck.

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We finally had to roll it to the top of the dune, chocking it on the way with our bodies. Then we brought the truck up under it. It was a terrible job, but we did it and then I helped Clare into the driver's seat, just as though I expected her to go safey back to town with Doc. I turned. He was staring at me, glasses shining in the moonlight like smaller moons. He was just three steps away.

"It has to be now," he smiled. The gun swung up.

"Get going, Clare!" I yelled and ducked and rolled under the truck. As I got to my feet on the far side, I heard the crack of his shot. It must have pierced the globe. I had to see too. I don't believe anybody could have helped going to look,—gun or no gun. The wealth of a world—dripping away before our eyes into the thirsty sand. Doc scrambed up onto the truck. . . .

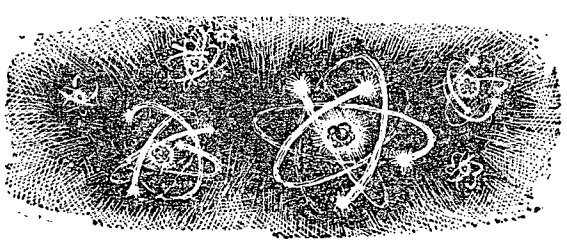
Whimpering, Doc tried to hold his hand over the jagged hole. Then he bent, put his mouth to it, tasted—spat.

"Water!" he yelled. A wilder cry never rang across the desert. *"Water!"* and he crumpled down beside the treasure of Mars, weeping.

We got him to a hospital. They tell us he'll never recover. He's very quiet except when they try to get him to take a bath or a drink of water. Then he gets really violent.

As for the contents of my box, we took it to the government scientists to be analyzed. It seems it contains a very unusual crystal which is revealing strange magnetic properties under the careful experimenting of the scientists. They're talking about a cure for cancer, maybe even regeneration of cells. It seems the crystal controls and regulates cell growth.

Clare's box? Well, we're saving that. It held a pair of what look like baby bootees, in gold mesh intricately worked with jewels. A gift from the children of Mars. The government says we're to keep them. You never can tell when a family will need a pair of baby bootees. Especially a happy family like Clare and me.



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the most sentimental man

by EVELYN E. SMITH

Once these irritating farewells were over with, he could begin to live as he wished and as he'd dreamed

JOHNSON went to see the others off at Idlewild. He knew they'd expect him to and, since it would be the last conventional gesture he'd have to make, he might as well conform to their notions of what was right and proper.

For the past few centuries the climate had been getting hotter; now, even though it was not yet June, the day was uncomfortably warm. The sun's rays glinting off the bright metal flanks of the ship dazzled his eyes, and perspiration made his shirt stick to his shoulder blades beneath the jacket that the formality of the occasion had required. He wished Clifford would hurry up and get the leave-taking over with.

But, even though Clifford was undoubtedly even more anxious than he to finish with all this ceremony and take off, he wasn't the kind of man to let inclination influence his actions. "Sure you won't change your mind and come with us?"

Johnson shook his head.

The young man looked at him—hatred for the older man's complication of what should have been a simple de-

Johnson knew he was annoying the younger man, who so obviously lived by the regulations in the Colonial Officer's Manual *and lacked the imagination to understand why he was doing this. . .Evelyn E. Smith is famous for her bitter-sweet stories of the worlds of Tomorrow.*

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parture showing through the pellicule of politeness. He was young for, since this trip had only slight historical importance and none of any other kind, the authorities had felt a junior officer entirely sufficient. It was clear, however, that Clifford attributed his commandership to his merits, and he was very conscious of his great responsibility.

"We have plenty of room on the ship," he persisted. "There weren't many left to go. We could take you easily enough, you know."

Johnson made a negative sign again. The rays of the sun beating full upon his head made apparent the grey that usually blended into the still-thick blond hair. Yet, though past youth, he was far from being an old man. "I've made my decision," he said, remembering that anger now was pointless.

"If it's—if you're just too proud to change your mind," the young commander said, less certainly, "I'm sure everyone will understand if... if..."

Johnson smiled. "No, it's just that I want to stay—that's all."

But the commander's clear blue eyes were still baffled, uneasy, as though he felt he had not done the utmost that duty—not duty to the service but to humanity—required. That was the trouble with people, Johnson thought: when they were most well-meaning they became most troublesome.

Clifford lowered his voice to an appropriately funeral hush, as a fresh thought obviously struck him. "I know, of course, that your loved ones are buried here and perhaps you feel it's your duty to stay with them...?"

At this Johnson almost forgot that anger no longer had any validity. By "loved ones" Clifford undoubtedly had meant Elinor and Paul. It was true that Johnson had had a certain affection for his wife and son when they were alive; now that they were dead they represented an episode in his life that had not, perhaps, been unpleasant, but was certainly over and done with now.

Did Clifford think *that* was his reason for remaining? Why, he must believe Johnson to be the most sentimental man on Earth. "And, come to think of it," Johnson said to himself, amused, "I am—or soon will be—just that."

The commander was still unconsciously pursuing the same train of thought. "It does seem incredible," he said in a burst of boyish candor that did not become him, for he was not that young, "that you'd want to stay alone on a whole planet. I mean to say—entirely alone... There'll never be another ship, you know—at least not in your lifetime."

Johnson knew what the oth-

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er man was thinking. If there'd been a woman with Johnson now, Clifford might have been able to understand a little better how the other could stick by his decision.

Johnson wriggled, as sweat oozed stickily down his back. "For God's sake," he said silently, "take your silly ship and get the hell off my planet." Aloud he said, "It's a good planet, a little worn-out but still in pretty good shape. Pity you can't trade in an old world like an old car, isn't it?"

"If it weren't so damned far from the center of things," the young man replied, defensively assuming the burden of all civilization, "we wouldn't abandon it. After all, we hate leaving the world on which we originated. But it's a long haul to Alpha Centauri—you know that—and a tremendously expensive one. Keeping up this place solely out of sentiment would be sheer waste—the people would never stand for the tax burden."

"A costly museum, yes," Johnson agreed.

How much longer were these dismal farewells going to continue? How much longer would the young man still feel the need to justify himself? "If only there were others fool enough—if only there were others with you... But, even if anybody else'd be willing to cut himself off entirely from the rest of the civilized universe, the Earth won't support enough of a population to keep it running. Not according to our present living standards anyway... Most of its resources are gone, you know—hardly an coal or oil left, and that's not worth digging for when there are better and cheaper fuels in the system."

He was virtually quoting from the *Colonial Officer's Manual*. Were there any people left able to think for themselves, Johnson wondered. Had there ever been? Had he thought for himself in making his decision, or was he merely clinging to a childish dream that all men had had and lost?

"With man gone, Earth will replenish herself," he said aloud. First the vegetation would begin to grow thick. Already it had released itself from the restraint of cultivation; soon it would be spreading out over the continent, overrunning the cities with delicately persistent green tendrils. Some the harsh winters would kill, but others would live on and would multiply. Vines would twist themselves about the tall buildings and tenderly, passionately squeeze them to death... eventually send them tumbling down. And then the trees would rear themselves in their places.

The swamps that man had filled in would begin to reappear one by one, as the land sank back to a pristine state.

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The sea would go on changing her boundaries, with no dikes to stop her. Volcanoes would heave up the land into different configurations. The heat would increase until it grew unbearable...only there would be no one—no human, anyway—to bear it.

Year after year the leaves would wither and fall and decay. Rock would cover them. And some day...billions of years thence...there would be coal and oil—and nobody to want them.

"Very likely Earth will replenish herself," the commander agreed, "but not in your time or your children's time...That is, not in *my* children's time," he added hastily.

The handful of men lined up in a row before the airlock shuffled their feet and allowed their muttering to become a few decibels louder. Clifford looked at his wrist chronometer. Obviously he was no less anxious than the crew to be off, but, for the sake of his conscience, he must make a last try.

"Damn your conscience," Johnson thought. "I hope that for this you feel guilty as hell, that you wake up nights in a cold sweat remembering that you left one man alone on the planet you and your kind discarded. Not that I don't want to stay, mind you, but that I want you to suffer the way you're making me suffer now—having to listen to your platitudes."

The commander suddenly stopped paraphrasing the *Manual*. "Camping out's fun for a week or two, you know, but it's different when it's for a lifetime."

Johnson's fingers curled in his palms...he was even angrier now that the commander had struck so close to home. Camping out...was that all he was doing—fulfilling childhood desires, nothing more?

Fortunately Clifford didn't realize that he had scored, and scuttled back to the shelter of the *Manual*. "Perhaps you don't know enough about the new system in Alpha Centauri," he said, a trifle wildly. "It has two suns surrounded by three planets, Thalia, Aglaia, and Euphrosyne. Each of these planets is slightly smaller than Earth, so that the decrease in gravity is just great enough to be pleasant, without being so marked as to be inconvenient. The atmosphere is almost exactly like that of Earth's, except that it contains several beneficial elements which are absent here—and the climate is more temperate. Owing to the fact that the planets are partially shielded from the suns by cloud layers, the temperature—except immediately at the poles and the equators, where it is slightly more extreme—is always equable, resembling that of Southern California..."

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"Sounds charming," said Johnson. "I too have read the Colonial Office handouts... I wonder what the people who wrote them'll do now that there's no longer any necessity for attracting colonists—everybody's already up in Alpha Centauri. Oh, well; there'll be other systems to conquer and colonize."

"The word *conquer* is hardly correct," the commander said stiffly, "since not one of the three planets had any indigenous life forms that was intelligent."

"Or life forms that you recognized as intelligent," Johnson suggested gently. Although why should there be such a premium placed on intelligence, he wondered. Was intelligence the sole criterion on which the right to life and to freedom should be based?

The commander frowned and looked at his chronometer again. "Well," he finally said, "since you feel that way and you're sure you've quite made up your mind, my men *are* anxious to go."

"Of course they are," Johnson said, managing to convey just the right amount of reproach.

Clifford flushed and started to walk away.

"I'll stand out of the way of your jets!" Johnson called after him. "It would be so anticlimactic to have me burned to a crisp after all this. Bon voyage!"

There was no reply.

Johnson watched the silver vessel shoot up into the sky and thought, "Now is the time for me to feel a pang, or even a twinge, but I don't at all. I feel relieved, in fact, but that's probably the result of getting rid of that fool Clifford."

He crossed the field briskly, pulling off his jacket and discarding his tie as he went. His ground car remained where he had parked it—in an area clearly marked *No Parking*.

They'd left him an old car that wasn't worth shipping to the stars. How long it would last was anybody's guess. The government hadn't been deliberately illiberal in leaving him such a shabby vehicle; if there had been any way to ensure a continuing supply of fuel, they would probably have left him a reasonably good one. But, since only a little could be left, allowing him a good car would have been simply an example of conspicuous waste, and the government had always preferred its waste to be inconspicuous.

He drove slowly through the broad boulevards of Long Island, savoring the loneliness. New York as a residential area had been a ghost-town for years, since the greater part of its citizens had been among the first to emigrate to the stars. However, since it was the capitol of the world and most of the

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interstellar ships—particularly the last few—had taken off from its spaceports, it had been kept up as an official embarkation center. Thus, paradoxically, it was the last city to be completely evacuated, and so, although the massive but jerry-built apartment houses that lined the streets were already crumbling, the roads had been kept in fairly good shape and were hardly cracked at all.

Still, here and there the green was pushing its way up in unlikely places. A few more of New York's tropical summers, and Long Island would soon become a wilderness.

The streets were empty, except for the cats sunning themselves on long-abandoned doorsteps or padding about on obscure errands of their own. Perhaps their numbers had not increased since humanity had left the city to them, but there certainly seemed to be more—striped and solid, black and grey and white and tawny—accepting their citizenship with equanimity. They paid no attention to Johnson—they had long since dissociated themselves from a humanity that had not concerned itself greatly over their welfare. On the other hand, neither he nor the surface car appeared to startle them; the old ones had seen such before, and to kittens the very fact of existence is the ultimate surprise.

The Queensborough Bridge was deadly silent. It was completely empty except for a calico cat moving purposefully toward Manhattan. The structure needed a coat of paint, Johnson thought vaguely, but of course it would never get one. Still, even uncared for, the bridges should outlast him—there would be no heavy traffic to weaken them. Just in case of unforeseeable catastrophe, however—he didn't want to be trapped on an island, even Manhattan Island—he had remembered to provide himself with a rowboat; a motorboat would have been preferable, but then the fuel difficulty would arise again...

How empty the East River looked without any craft on it! It was rather a charming little waterway in its own right, though nothing to compare with the stately Hudson. The water scintillated in the sunshine and the air was clear and fresh, for no factories had spewed fumes and smoke into it for many years. There were few gulls, for nothing was left for the scavenger; those remaining were forced to make an honest living by catching fish.

In Manhattan, where the buildings had been more soundly constructed, the signs of abandonment were less evident...empty streets, an occasional cracked window. Not even an unusual amount of dirt because, in the

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past, the normal activities of an industrial and ruggedly individual city had provided more grime than years of neglect could ever hope to equal. No, it would take Manhattan longer to go back than Long Island. Perhaps that too would not happen during his lifetime.

Yet, after all, when he reached Fifth Avenue he found that Central Park had burst its boundaries. Fifty-ninth Street was already half jungle, and the lush growth spilled down the avenues and spread raggedly out into the sidestreets, pushing its way up through the cracks it had made in the surface of the roads. Although the Plaza fountain had not flowed for centuries, water had collected in the leaf-choked basin from the last rain, and a group of grey squirrels were gathered around it, shrilly disputing possession with some starlings.

Except for the occasional cry of a cat in the distance, these voices were all that he heard... the only sound. Not even the sudden blast of a jet regaining power...he would never hear that again; never hear the stridor of a human voice piercing with anger; the cacophony of a hundred television sets, each playing a different program; the hoot of a horn; off-key singing; the thin, uncertain notes of an amateur musician...these would never be heard on Earth again.

He sent the car gliding slowly... no more traffic rules...down Fifth Avenue. The buildings here also were well-built; they were many centuries old and would probably last as many more. The shop windows were empty, except for tangles of dust... an occasional broken, discarded mannequin... In some instances the glass had already cracked or fallen out. Since there were no children to throw stones, however, others might last indefinitely, carefully glassing in nothingness. Doors stood open and he could see rows of empty counters and barren shelves fuzzed high with the dust of the years since a customer had approached them.

Cats sedately walked up and down the avenue or sat genteelly with tails tucked in on the steps of the cathedral —as if the place had been theirs all along.

Dusk was falling. Tonight, for the first time in centuries, the street lamps would not go on. Undoubtedly when it grew dark he would see ghosts, but they would be the ghosts of the past and he had made his peace with the past long since; it was the present and the future with which he had not come to terms. And now there would be no present, no past, no future—but all merged into one and he was the only one.

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At Forty-second Street pigeons fluttered thickly around the public library, fat as ever, their numbers greater, their appetites grosser. The ancient library, he knew, had changed little inside: stacks and shelves would still be packed thick with reading matter. Books are bulky, so only the rare editions had been taken beyond the stars; the rest had been microfilmed and their originals left to Johnson and decay. It was his library now, and he had all the time in the world to read all the books in the world—for there were more than he could possibly read in the years that, even at the most generous estimate, were left to him.

He had been wondering where to make his permanent residence for, with the whole world his, he would be a fool to confine himself to some modest dwelling. Now he fancied it might be a good idea to move right into the library. Very few places in Manhattan could boast a garden of their own.

He stopped the car to stare thoughtfully at the little park behind the grimy monument to Neoclassicism. Like Central Park, Bryant had already slipped its boundaries and encroached upon Sixth Avenue—Avenue of the World, the street signs said now, and before that it had been Avenue of the Nations and Avenue of the Americas, but to the public it had always been Sixth Avenue and to Johnson, the last man on Earth, it was Sixth Avenue.

He'd live in the library, while he stayed in New York, that was—he'd thought that in a few weeks, when it got really hot, he might strike north. He had always meant to spend a summer in Canada. His surface car would probably never last the trip, but the Museum of Ancient Vehicles had been glad to bestow half a dozen of the bicycles from their exhibits upon him. After all, he was, in effect, a museum piece himself and so as worth preserving as the bicycles; moreover, bicycles are difficult to pack for an interstellar trip. With reasonable care, these might last him his lifetime...

But he had to have a permanent residence somewhere, and the library was an elegant and commodious dwelling, centrally located. New York would have to be his headquarters, for all the possessions he had carefully amassed and collected and begged and—since money would do him no good any more—bought, were here. And there were by far too many of them to be transported to any really distant location. He loved to own things.

He was by no means an advocate of Rousseau's complete return to nature; whatever civilization had left that he could use without compro-

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mise, he would—and thankfully. There would be no electricity, of course, but he had provided himself with flashlights and bulbs and batteries—not too many of the last, of course, because they'd grow stale. However, he'd also laid in plenty of candles and a vast supply of matches... Tins of food and concentrates and synthetics, packages of seed should he grow tired of all these and want to try growing his own—fruit, he knew, would be growing wild soon enough... Vitamins and medicines—of course, were he to get really ill or get hurt in some way, it might be the end...but that was something he wouldn't think of—something that couldn't possibly happen to him...

For his relaxation he had an antique hand-wound phonograph, together with thousands of oldfashioned records. And then, of course, he had the whole planet, the whole world to amuse him.

He even had provided himself with a heat-ray gun and a substantial supply of ammunition, although he couldn't imagine himself ever killing an animal for food. It was squeamishness that stood in his way rather than any ethical considerations, although he did indeed believe that every creature had the right to live. Nonetheless, there was the possibility that the craving for fresh meat might change his mind for him. Besides, although hostile animals had long been gone from this part of the world—the only animals would be birds and squirrels and, farther up the Hudson, rabbits and chipmunks and deer.. perhaps an occasional bear in the mountains—who knew what harmless life form might become a threat now that is development would be left unchecked?

A cat sitting atop one of the stately stone lions outside the library met his eye with such a steady gaze of understanding, though not of sympathy, that he found himself needing to repeat the by-now almost magic phrase to himself: "Not in my lifetime anyway." Would some intelligent life form develop to supplant man? Or would the planet revert to a primeval state of mindless innocence? He would never know and he didn't really care...no point in speculating over unanswerable questions.

He settled back luxuriously on the worn cushions of his car. Even so little as twenty years before, it would have been impossible for him—for anyone—to stop his vehicle in the middle of Forty-second Street and Fifth Avenue purely to meditate. But it was his domain now. He could go in the wrong direction on one-way streets, stop wherever he pleased, drive as fast or as slowly as he would (and could, of course). If he

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wanted to do anything as vulgar as spit in the street, he could (but they were his streets now, not to be sullied)...cross the roads without waiting for the lights to change (it would be a long, long wait if he did)...go to sleep when he wanted, eat as many meals as he wanted whenever he chose... He could go naked in hot weather and there'd be no one to raise an eyebrow, deface public buildings (except that they were private buildings now, his buildings), idle without the guilty feeling that there was always something better he could and should be doing ...even if there were not. There would be no more guilty feelings; without people and their knowledge there was no more guilt.

A flash of movement in the bushes behind the library caught his eye. Surely that couldn't be a faun in Bryant Park? So soon?... He'd thought it would be another ten years at least before the wild animals came sniffing timidly along the Hudson, venturing a little further each time they saw no sign of their age-old enemy.

But probably the deer was only his imagination. He would investigate further after he had moved into the library.

Perhaps a higher building than the library.... But then he would have to climb too many flights of stairs. The elevators wouldn't be working...silly of him to forget that. There were a lot of steps outside the library too —it would be a chore to get his bicycles up those steps.

Then he smiled to himself. Robinson Crusoe would have been glad to have had bicycles and steps and such relatively harmless animals as bears to worry about. No, Robinson Crusoe never had it so good as he, Johnson would have, and what more could he want?

For, whoever before in history had had his dreams—and what was wrong with dreams, after all?—so completely gratified? What child, envisioning a desert island all his own could imagine that his island would be the whole world? Together Johnson and the Earth would grow young again.

No, the stars were for others. Johnson was not the first man in history who had wanted the Earth, but he had been the first man—and probably the last—who had actually been given it. And he was well content with his bargain.

There was plenty of room for the bears too.

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now we are three

by JOE L. HENSLEY

It didn't matter that he had quit. He was still one of the guilty. He had seen it in her eyes and in the eyes of others.

JOHN RUSH smoothed the covers over his wife, tucking them in where her restless moving had pulled them away from the mattress. The twins moved beside him, their smooth hands following his in the task, their blind eyes intent on nothingness.

"Thank you," he said softly to them, knowing they could not hear him. But it made him feel better to talk.

His wife, Mary, was quiet. Her breathing was smooth, easy—almost as if she were sleeping.

The long sleep.

He touched her forehead, but it was cool. The doctor has said it was a miracle she had lived this long. He stood away from the bed for a moment watching before he went on out to the porch. The twins moved back into what had become a normal position for them in the past months: One on each side of the bed, their thin hands holding Mary's tightly, the milky blind eyes surveying something that could not be seen by his eyes. Sometimes they would stand like this for hours.

Outside the evening was

Where are we going? What will the world be like in the days—perhaps not too distant—when we have tested and tested the bombs to the finite degree? Joe L. Hensley, attorney in Madison, Indiana, and increasingly well known in SF, returns with this challenging story of that Tomorrow.

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cool, the light not quite gone. He sat in the rocking chair and waited for the doctor who had promised to come—and yet might not come. The bitterness came back, the self hate. He remembered a young man and promises made, but not kept; a girl who had believed and never lost faith even when he had retreated back to the land away from everything. Long sullen silences, self-pity, brooding over the news stories that got worse and worse. And the children—one born dead—two born deaf and dumb and blind.

Worse than dead.

You helped, he accused himself. You worked for those who set off the bombs and tested and tested while the cycle went up and up beyond human tolerance—not the death level, but the level where nothing was sure again, the level that made cancer a thing of epidemic proportions, replacing statistically all of the insane multitude of things that man could do to kill himself. Even the good things that the atom had brought were destroyed in the panic that ensued. No matter that you quit. You are still one of the guilty. You have seen it hidden in her eyes and you have seen it in the milky eyes of the twins.

Worse than dead.

Dusk became night and finally the doctor came. It had begun to lightning and a few large drops of rain stroked good year for the farming he had retreated to. Not a good year for anything. He stood to greet the doctor and the other man with him.

"Good evening, doctor," he said.

"Mr. Rush—" the doctor shook hands gingerly, "I hope you don't mind me bringing someone along—this is Mr. North. He is with the County Juvenile Office." The young doctor smiled. "How is the patient this evening?"

"She is the same," John Rush said to the doctor. He turned to the other man, keeping his face emotionless, hands at his side. He had expected this for some time. "I think you will be wanting to look at the twins. They are by her bed." He opened the door and motioned them in and then followed.

He heard the juvenile man catch his breath a little. The twins were playing again. They had left their vigil at the bedside and they were moving swiftly around the small living room, their hands and arms and legs moving in some synchronized game that had no meaning—their movements quick and sure—their faces showing some intensity, some purpose. They moved with grace, avoiding obstructions.

"I thought these children were blind," Mr. North said.

John smiled a little. "It is

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unnerving. I have seen them play like this before—though they have not done so for a long time—since my wife has been ill." He lowered his head. "They are blind, deaf, and dumb."

"How old are they?"

"Twelve."

"They do not seem to be more than eight—nine at the most."

"They have been well fed," John said softly.

"How about schooling, Mr. Rush. The teaching of handicapped children is not something that can be done by a person untrained in the field."

"I have three degrees, Mr. North. When my wife became ill and I began to care for them I taught them to read braille. They picked it up very quickly, though they showed little continued interest in it. I read a number of books in the field of teaching handicapped children..." He let it trail off.

"Your degrees were in physics, were they not, Mr. Rush?" Now the touch of malice came.

"That is correct." He sat down in one of the wooden chairs. "I quit working long before the witch hunts came. I was never indicted."

"Nevertheless your degrees are no longer bona-fide. All such degrees have been stricken from the records." He looked down and John saw that his eyes no longer hid the hate. "If your wife dies I doubt that any court would allow you to keep custody of these children.

A year before—even six months and John would not have protested. Now he had to make the effort. "They are my children—such as they are—and I will fight any attempt to take them from me."

The Juvenile Man smiled without humor. "My wife and I had a child last year, Mr. Rush. Or perhaps I should say that a child was born to us. I am glad that child was born dead—I think my wife is even glad. Perhaps we should try again—I understand that you and your kind have left us an even chance on a normal birth." He paused for a moment. "I shall file a petition with the circuit court asking that the Juvenile Office be appointed guardians of your children, Mr. Rush. I hope you do not choose to resist that petition—feeling would run pretty high against an ex-physicist who tried to prove he *deserved* children." He turned away stiffly and went out the front door. In a little while Rush heard the car door slam decisively.

The doctor was replacing things in the black bag. "I'm sorry, John. He said he was going to come out here anyway so I invited him to come with me."

John nodded. "My wife?"

"There is no change."

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"And no chance."

"There never has been one. The brain tumor is too large and too inaccessible for treatment or surgery. It will be soon now. I am surprised that she has lasted this long. I am prolonging a sure process." He turned away. "That's all I can do."

"Thank you for coming, doctor—I appreciate that." Rush smiled bitterly, unable to stop himself. "But aren't you afraid that your other patients will find out?"

The doctor stopped, his face paling slightly. "I took an oath when I graduated from medical school. Sometimes I want to break that oath, but I have not so far." He paused. "Try as I may I cannot blame them for hating you. You know why."

Rush wanted to laugh and cry at the same time. "Don't you realize that the government that punished the men I worked with for their 'criminal negligence' is the same government that commissioned them to do that work—that officials were warned and rewarned of the things that small increases in radiation might do and that such things might not show up immediately—and yet they ordered us ahead." He stopped for a moment and put his head down, touching his work roughened hands to his eyes. "They put us in prison for refusing to do a job or investigated us until no one could or would trust us in civilian jobs—then when it was done they put us in prison or worse because the very things we warned them of came true."

"Perhaps that is true," the doctor said stiffly, "but the choice of refusing was still possible."

"Some of us did refuse to work," Rush said softly. "I did, for one. Perhaps you think that we alone will bear the blame. You are wrong. Sooner or later the stigma will spread to all of the sciences—and to you, doctor. Too many now that you can't save; in a little while the hate will surround you also. When we are gone and they must find something new to hate they will blame you for every malformed baby and every death. You think that one of you will find a cure for this thing. Perhaps you would if you had a hundred years or a thousand years, but you haven't. They killed a man on the street in New York the other day because he was wearing a white laboratory smock. What do you wear in your office, doctor? Hate blind eyes can't tell the difference: Physicist, chemist, doctor... We all look the same to a fool. Even if there were a cancer cure that is only a part of the problem. There are the babies. Your science cannot cope with the cause—only mine can do that."

The doctor lowered his

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head and turned away toward the door.

There was another thing left to say: "If the plumbing went bad in your home, doctor, you would call a plumber, for he would be the one competent to fix it." Rush shook his head slowly. "But what happens when there are no plumbers left?"

The children were by the bed, their hands holding those of the mother. Gently John Rush tugged those hands away and led them toward their own bed. The small hands were cold in his own and he felt a tiny feeling of revulsion as they tightened. Then the feeling slipped away and was replaced—as if a current had crossed from their hands to his. It was a warm feeling—one that he had known before when they touched him, but for which he had never been able to find mental words to express the sensation.

Slowly he helped them undress. When they were in the single bed he covered them with the top sheet. Their milky eyes surveyed him, unseeing, somehow withdrawn.

"I have not known you well," he said. "I left that to her. I have sat and brooded and buried myself in the earth until it is too late for much else." He touched the small heads. "I wish you could hear me. I wish..."

Outside on the road a truck roared past. Instinctively he set to hear it. The faces below him did not change.

He turned away quickly then and went back out on the porch. He filled his pipe and sat down in the old, creaky rocker. A tiny rain had begun to fall hesitantly—as if afraid of striking the sun hardened ground.

Somewhere out there, somewhere hunted, but not found, the plumbers gathered. There had been a man—what was his name? Masser—that was it. He had been working on a way to inhibit radioactivity—speed up the half-life until they had taken the grant away. If a man can do whatever he thinks of—can he undo that which he has done?

Masser was the theoreticist—I was the applier, the one who translated equations into cold blueprints. And I was good until they...

They had hounded him back to the land when he quit. Others had not been so lucky. When a whole people panic then an object for their hate must be found. A naming. An immediate object. He remembered the newspaper story that began: "They lynched twelve men, twelve ex-men, in New Mexico last night..."

Have I been wrong? Have I done the right thing? He remembered the tiny hands in his own, the blind eyes.

Those hands. Why do they make me feel like...

He let his head slide back

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against the padded top of the rocking chair and fell into a light, uneasy sleep.

The dreams came as they had before. Tiny, inhumanly capable hands clutched at him and the sun was hot above. There was a background sound of hydrogen b o m b s, heard mutely. He looked down at the hands that touched and asked something of his own. The eyes were not milky now. They stared up at him, alert and questioning. *What is it you want?*

The wind tore holes in tiny voices and there was the sound of laughter and his wife's eyes were looking into his own, sorry only for him, at peace with the rest. And they formed a ring around him, t h o s e three, hands caught together, enclosing him. *What is it you are saying?*

It seemed to him that the words would come clear, but the rain came then, great torrents of it, washing all away, all sight and sound...

He awoke and only the rain was true. The tiny rain had increased to a wind-driven downpour and he was soaked where it had blown under the eaves onto the porch.

From inside the house he heard a cry.

She was sitting upright in bed. Her eyes were open and full of pain. He went quickly to her and touched her pulse. It was faint and reedy.

"I hurt," she whispered.

Quickly, as the doctor had taught him, he made up a shot of morphine, a full quarter grain, and gave it to her. Her eyes glazed down, but did not close.

"John," she said softly, "the children...t h e y...talk to..." She twisted on the bed and he held her with strong arms until the eyes closed again and her breathing became easy. He pushed the ruffled hair back from her eyes and straightened the awry sheets.

The vibration of his walking might have wakened the twins. He tiptoed to *their* bed —for they refused to be parted even in sleep.

For a second he thought that the small night-light had tricked him by shadows on shadows. He reached down to touch...

They were gone.

He fought down sudden panic. Where can two children, deaf and dumb and blind go in the middle of the night?

Not far.

He opened the door to the kitchen, hand-hunted for the hanging light. They were not there—nor were they on the small back porch. The panic passed critical mass, exploded out of control. He lurched back into the combination living room, bed room. He looked under all of the beds and into the small closet—

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everywhere that two children might conceal themselves.

Outside the rain had increased. He peered out into the lightning night. A truck horn blew ominously far down the road.

The road?

He slogged through the mud, instantly soaking as soon as he was out of shelter, not knowing or caring. Through the front yard, out to the road. He could see the lights of the truck coming from far away, two tiny points in the darkness. But no twins.

He waited helplessly while the truck rushed past, its headlights cutting holes in the darkness—fearing those lights would outline something that he had not seen. But there was nothing.

For another eternity he hunted the muddy fields, the small barn and outbuildings. The clutch of fear made him shout their names, though he knew they could not hear.

And then, suddenly, all fear was gone—like a summer squall near the sea, with the sun close behind. It was as if their hands had reached out and touched him and brought the strange feeling again.

"They are in the house," he said aloud and knew he was right.

He took time to discard muddy shoes on the porch before he opened the door. And they were there—by the mother's bed, hands clasped over hers.

He felt a tiny chill. Their eyes were watching the door as he opened it, their faces set to receive some stimuli—already set—as if they had known he was coming.

Mary was breathing softly. On her face all trace of pain had disappeared and now there was the tiny smile that had been hers long ago. Her breathing was even, but light as forgotten conversation.

Gently he tried to pry their resisting hands away from hers. The hands fought back with a terrible strength beyond normality. By sheer greater force he tore one of the twins away.

It was like releasing a bomb. Sudden pain stabbed through his body. The twin struggled in his arms, the small hands reaching blindly out for the thing they had lost. And Mary's eyes opened and all of the uncontrolled pain came back into those eyes. Her body writhed on the bed, tearing the coverings away. The twin squirmed away from his slackening hold and once again caught at the hands of the mother.

All struggle ceased. Mary's eyes shut again, the pain lines smoothed themselves, the tiny smile flowered.

He reached out and touched the small hands on each side of the mother and the feeling for which there were no words came through more strongly

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than ever before. Tiny voices tried to whisper within the corners of his mind, partially blotted, sometimes heard. The *real* things, the things of hate and fear and despair retreated beyond the bugle call that sounded somewhere.

"She will die," the voice said; one voice for two. "This part of her will die."

And then *her* voice came—as it had been once before when all of the world was young. "You must not be afraid, John. I have known for a long time—for they were a part of me. And you could not know for your mind was hiding and alone. I have seen..."

He cried out and pulled his hands away. Sound died, the room was normal again. The milky, white eyes surveyed him, the hands remained locked securely over those of the mother. The thin carven features of the children were emotionless, waiting.

He strove for rational meaning within his brain. *These are my sons—they can not see or hear or speak. They are identical twins—born with those defects.*

Take two children, blind them, make them deaf to all sound, cut away their voices. They are identical twins, facing the same environment, sharing the same heredity of blasted chromosomes. They will have intelligence and curiosity that increases as they mature. They will not be blinded by the senses—the easy way. The first thing they will discover is each other.

What else might they then discover?

It has been said that when sight is lost the sense of touch and hearing increase to almost unbelievable acuteness—Rush knew that. The blind often also develop a sense almost like radar which allows them to perceive an object ahead of them and gives them the ability to follow twisting paths.

Take one child and put him under the disability that the twins were born with. As intelligence grows so does single bewilderment. The world is a puzzling and bewildering place. Braille is a great discovery—a way to communicate with the unknown that lies beyond.

But the twins had shown almost no interest in Braille.

He reached back down for the tiny hands.

"Yes, we can communicate," the single voice that spoke for two said. "We have tried with you before, but we could not break through. Your mind speaks in a language we do not understand, in figures and equations that are not real to us. Those things lie all through your mind—on the surface we have sensed only your pity for us and your hate for the shadowy ones around you, the ones we do not know. It was a wall we could not climb. She is different."

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"A part of her will go with us," the voice said. "There is another place that touches this one which we perceive and know more fully than this one."

The voice died away and brief pictures of a land of other dimensions beyond sight flashed in his brain. He had seen them before imperfectly in the disquieting dreams. "She must go with us for she can no longer exist here," the voice said softly. "Perhaps there are others like us to come—we do not yet know what we are or whether there will be others like us. But we must go now, before we were ready, because of her."

The mother's voice came. "You must go too. There is nothing here for you but sorrow. They will take you, John." A softness touched at him. "Please, John."

The longing was a thing of fire. To cast off the world that had already given him all of the hate and fear that he could stand, that had made him worse than a coward. To go with her.

But she no longer needed him. She was complete—as they were, only necessary to themselves.

He could not go.

During the long night he kept the vigil by the bedside; long after any need to keep it.

The twins were gone and she with them.

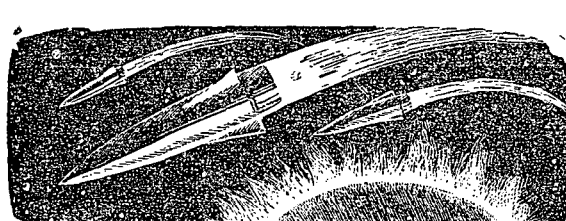
He could not cry for all tears seemed useless. He said a small prayer, something he had not done in years, over the cold thing left behind.

The rain had ceased outside. Somewhere out there in his world there were men trying to undo the harm that had been done, harm that he had helped to do, then retreated from. He had no right to retreat further.

Something spoke a requiem sentence in his consciousness, light as late sunset, only vaguely there. "*We are* here—we will wait for you...come to us...come..."

He wrote a short note for the doctor and the others who would come and hunt and go through the motions that men must live by. Perhaps the doctor might even understand.

"I have gone plumbing," the note said.



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john robert and the egg

by THOMAS N. SCORTIA

It was obvious that this was a very unusual egg—purple and gold, resembling a circus balloon, ready to burst . . .

ON A WARM sunny day in late June, John Robert walked through the dusty tobacco field of his Uncle Ben's farm toward the dirty white four-room farm house, carrying a dragon's egg wrapped in his faded blue denim shirt.

In all of his eight years he knew that nothing quite as wonderful had ever happened to him. Not even the time the merry-go-round truck had broken down in St. Basile in front of Beauchamp's General Store and the driver had let him peek at the enameled and gilded wooden horses through the heavy slats of their pine crates.

Not even the impossible joy of riding one of those great black and golden stallions could ever be quite as wonderful as this.

The first person John Robert saw, as he rounded the decaying double building that served as the chicken house and barn, was Grandpa Riley, sitting on the back porch, rocking and smoking his smelly black pipe.

"John Robert," the old man said, pulling his pipe from his mouth, "whut you doing 'thout your shirt on? You'll

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get your back blistered good and proper and then your Aunt Bess will really land on you."

"Ain't no fear o' that," John Robert said. "I'm good and brown already. See." He turned in a slow circle, exhibiting his back.

"Like plug tobacco," Grandpa agreed. "Whut you got in the shirt, John Robert?"

"It's a dragon's egg," John Robert said proudly.

"Do tell. Can't recollect ever seeing one o' them." The old man leaned forward in his rocker. "Unfold it and let's fetch a look," he demanded.

John Robert carefully folded back the layers of blue cloth. The egg was about four inches long and looked very much like a large hen's egg except that its surface was wrinkled and glistened like wet leather.

"Huh, it's sort o' greenish," Grandpa Riley observed. "Where'd you get it?"

"Found it down in the swamp...on the bank in a sort o' mud nest."

"Better not tell your Aunt Bess. She tole you to stay away from that swamp. She'll whop you good."

"Don't tell Aunt Bess what?" Aunt Bess demanded as her thin form appeared at the sagging screen door and she stepped out, blinking into the sun.

"Now'll you catch it," Grandpa whispered.

"John Robert, whut you got in your nice clean shirt?" she demanded. John Robert saw her hands move to her hips in the familiar gesture of annoyance.

"Dragon's egg," he said in a small voice.

"Huh! More'n likely a dirty 'gator egg."

"It is not," he said. "They was tracks all around it. Big tracks with claws."

Aunt Bess frowned and Grandpa Riley started to move away.

"Dragon's tracks," John Robert added triumphantly.

"'Gator tracks," Aunt Bess insisted. "Pa," she raised her voice, "you come back here and take this boy and make him get rid of that dirty egg."

"I was just gonna..."

"Never you mind. Get rid of that dirty egg." She opened the door and went into the kitchen, mumbling, "Where does that boy get such..."

"Pa," she called over her shoulder, "now mind." They heard her voice sink to an almost inaudible mutter of complaint.

"Well, John Robert," Grandpa Riley said. He shoved his pipe into his mouth so hard that John Robert heard it click against his store teeth.

"Do we have to?"

"Wouldn't dast keep it."

"I wanted to hatch it." John Robert bit his lip. "She don't need to know."

"Real dragon tracks, you

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say?" Grandpa Riley's voice sank to a whisper and the corners of his eyes crinkled.

"Uh, huh...With three toes and claws."

"'Course, 'gator eggs is hard, not soft and wrinkly like this'n." Grandpa paused in thought, then grabbed John Robert's arm and pulled him toward the deserted chicken house that leaned limply against the larger barn.

"Tell you what, John Robert," he said.

That evening at dinner John Robert sat silently opposite Grandpa Riley and slowly mashed the boiled potatoes into his plate with the worn fork and thought grand thoughts. Occasionally he would steal a secret look at Grandpa and think of the treasure wrapped carefully in layer on layer of flannel and hidden in a warm corner of the hen house.

Grandpa hadn't been sure if the egg needed warmth or whether it would hatch without extra heat as does a turtle's egg or an alligator's egg. However, since they had nothing to serve as an incubator, they had compromised on wrapping the egg in an old flannel nightshirt of Uncle Ben's and placing the bundle so that the sun would fall on the egg most of the day through one of the two windows in the hen house.

A kind of nervous excitement had seized John Robert and, though Aunt Bess complained tiredly at dinner to Uncle Ben who had returned late from the cotton mill, John Robert scarcely heard her.

"Look at that boy," she fretted, "playing with his good food when prices is so high a body can barely make do." Uncle Ben gave a tired grunt and continued to eat. "He shore don't take after his ma and pa, God rest their souls with him dreamin' and lazin' his time away. Why, would you believe it..."

And she was off on the incident of the dragon's egg. Grandpa Riley gave his daughter a pained look and attacked his food with new vigor.

Later, after the oil lamp had been lighted in the kitchen and they had washed and dried the dishes, John Robert sat on the porch, watching the glowing cinder of Grandpa Riley's pipe and listening to the creak of his rocker mingle with the shrill music of the crickets and the katydids. Uncle Ben sat inside at the kitchen table, reading his newspaper, while Aunt Bess, who never came out after dark because of the mosquitoes from the swamp, sat opposite him, sewing on the wedding ring quilt she was making. Occasionally, John Robert could hear her shrill voice raised in comment.

"Ain't Aunt Bess ever been

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happy?" John Robert asked.

"Well, I recollect she used to be different...maybe even a little like you, John Robert."

"What happened?"

Grandpa Riley sucked thoughtfully at his pipe."

"I guess she just grew up," he said.

They sat silently, savoring the heavy night air.

"Grandpa," John Robert asked at last, "where do dragon's come from?"

"Oh, all places, John Robert."

"Where?"

"China, Japan, Araby, places you and me never even heard tell of. Maybe places nobody on this earth's heard tell of."

"Oh," John Robert was silent for a moment. Then he said, "Maybe he'll want to fly back there."

"Maybe...if he's the flyin' kind."

"Oh, he'll be the flyin' kind," John Robert insisted. "And maybe..."

"John Robert," Aunt Bess's voice pierced his words, "you get yourself in here and warsh them feet and get to bed."

John Robert spent the rest of the week in rising anticipation, stealing to the secret hiding place at every opportunity to observe the progress of the egg. It quickly became apparent that this was a very unusual egg indeed. For one thing the shell itself appeared to be elastic and, as the week progressed, the wrinkled surface filled out and the egg enlarged with surprising rapidity until it resembled a circus balloon, filled with water to the point of bursting. In addition, other, more startling changes became apparent.

"First time I ever seen an egg purple and gold," Grandpa Riley remarked with some excitement. The egg had indeed changed color from its original bilious green. By Friday the deepening shades of mottled purple and gold had assumed an irridescent sheen and the surface seemed to catch the light and throw it back into the eyes of the viewer in a rainbow shower of color.

"Like the wings of a butterfly," Grandpa observed. "Same color as a purple swallertail."

Aunt Bess noticed the increased tension and the furtive visits to the hen house. Since only the larger barn was still used and that only for storing a drum of kerosene for the household lamps, she demanded to know why John Robert and Grandpa Riley were "a-skulkin' around that place." For once Grandpa Riley managed to appear innocent under Aunt Bess's sharp questioning and after awhile she found something more immediate to occupy her thoughts.

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The egg hatched on Sunday.

"Well," Grandpa admitted, "it sure ain't no 'gator."

"It ain't quite what I expected," John Robert said, holding the foot-long reptile in his lap and stroking it gently. The animal made a soft cooing sound every time his fingers brushed the soft fleshy ridge that ran from its forehead down its back to the tip of its tail. A tiny forked tongue darted out to brush John Robert's hand.

"Well, I told you he mightn't be the flyin' kind," Grandpa said.

"Maybe, these'll be wings." John Robert hopefully touched the filmy sac-like protrusions on each side of the fleshy ruff.

"Maybe," Grandpa admitted. "Whut'll we call him?"

"You 'member that book I used to have, the one with the green cover?"

Grandpa scratched his chin. "You mean *The Laughing Dragon of Oz*?"

"That one. Let's call him Ozzie. You like that, Grandpa?"

"Uh, hm-m-m-m," Grandpa said thoughtfully. "Course, he'll have to grow some to fit that name."

Ozzie cooed indignantly.

"He'll get real big," John Robert said belligerently. "I know he will."

"Probably grow just like a weed, considerin' how fast the egg growed," Grandpa agreed. "Wonder what he eats?"

"People?" John Robert hazarded.

"Little small for that, don't you reckon? Anyway, don't know as how we could get any for him."

The problem of what to feed young Ozzie proved less difficult than they feared. John Robert tried him on carrots. Ozzie ate them, tops and all.

Grandpa tried potato peels. Ozzie munched them contentedly and then polished off the cardboard box in which Grandpa had smuggled them from the kitchen.

In rapid succession Ozzie demonstrated a taste for coffee grounds, buttons, hay, handkerchiefs, pipe tobacco and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. He grew rapidly on this varied diet and by the end of the second week he was over three feet long from blunt nose to arrow-pointed tail.

The hen house was rapidly becoming too small to hold Ozzie who, with increasing size, had become restless. John Robert and Grandpa Riley discussed transferring him to the tool room in the rear half of the barn. This, of course, increased the hazard of Aunt Bess's stumbling onto their secret. The decision was finally forced upon them.

On Wednesday of the third week after the arrival of Oz-

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zie, John Robert and Grandpa Riley sneaked into the hen house. Ozzie greeted them with a low bubbling moan. The cause of his anguish was easily discerned. He had devoured the lower six inches, nails and all, of three planks that made up one wall of the hen house.

"He sure has an appetite," John Robert observed. Ozzie rubbed his glistening back against John Robert's legs and groaned. He buried his muzzle in the boy's midsection and burped softly.

"Tarnation," Grandpa said, "ain't there nothing you won't eat?"

Ozzie eyed him reproachfully and his blunt head drooped.

"Tarnation," Grandpa Riley repeated, withdrawing his foot as Ozzie began to nibble on the leather of his left toe. From one scaley nostril dribbled the faintest wisp of grey smoke.

"That settles it," Grandpa said. "We'll have to use the tool shed and Bess be hanged if she finds out. Good thing the stone foundation comes up about four feet in back," he added, observing the smoke. "Wonder if he's going to start spurtin' fire?"

Ozzie was installed in his new home and, as his growth increased, John Robert and Grandpa Riley were increasingly thankful for the stone foundation of the barn. Ozzie, depending on his diet of the moment, would snort smoke and on occasion even small tongues of flame. With developing maturity, however, he showed no sign of the legendary fierceness of his kind. The growths on his back had enlarged to leathery sacs with the irregular appearance of wadded damp canvas. They did not share the shifting colors of his body, but remained a dirty grey. By the end of July they were as big as basketballs and growing daily. Ozzie was over fourteen feet long by then, a mottled golden, and increasingly difficult to contain in the tool room. It was inevitable that Aunt Bess should discover him.

It happened on the first Sunday of August, just a month before John Robert's scheduled return to school. Aunt Bess, still in her church dress and shoes, carried the old tin measuring cup with which she filled the oil lamps out to the barn to get kerosene. John Robert and Grandpa Riley were standing warily on the porch, their fingers crossed, when they heard a ragged scream which quickly choked into an inarticulate gurgle. Aunt Bess clawed her way through the double doors of the barn. Her eyes were rolling wildly and she was missing a shoe.

"It came through the wall," she wailed. "I was filling the cup and it poked its head

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through the wall." She fell limply to the porch as Uncle Ben thrust his head outside.

"What the Sam Hill's goin' on out here?" he demanded.

"There's a monster in the barn," Aunt Bess screamed. "It's drinking my coal oil."

"Oh, my," said John Robert.

"Tarnation," said Grandpa and they ran for the barn. Inside they found Ozzie, leaning against the drum of kerosene, his forked tongue darting out to pull in a growing puddle under the open spigot. The fleshy ruff down his neck was an inflamed brick red. He looked up as John Robert and Grandpa Riley appeared and rumbled inquiringly.

"Get him outside before he burps," Grandpa yelled and they circled to the rear of the dragon. John Robert nudged him gently with his hands and then pushed harder. Ozzie resisted feebly and then began to stumble for the open doors.

"Look," John Robert yelled, "he chewed his way right through the wall."

"That ain't all," Grandpa said as Ozzie weaved into the yard and Aunt Bess wailed another long sobbing wail. "The critter's drank up every bit o' that coal oil."

They followed Ozzie into the open and quickly herded him around the barn toward the open tobacco field. Just as the dragon pushed through into the open field, he hiccoughed wrackingly. Then he gave a monstrous burp. A six foot jet of smoky flame splashed down the furrows. Ozzie sank to the rough ground and emitted a soft moan.

"Heh, heh," said Grandpa, "what a stomachache you're gonna have."

"Stand back," Uncle Ben shouted, running around the corner of the barn and flourishing a double-barreled shotgun over his head. "Stand back whilst I blast the varmint."

"No," John Robert yelled.

"You'll do no such thing," Grandpa said, placing himself in front of Uncle Ben's rush.

"Hic," Ozzie said and a thick oily cloud of smoke enveloped his head.

It was fully twenty minutes before John Robert and Grandpa Riley could persuade Uncle Ben that Ozzie was harmless. By that time the dragon had exhausted his charge of kerosene. Occasionally, he would give a low moan while a tendril of black smoke as from a dying fire would trickle from his nostrils.

"You mean that hellion's a pet?" Uncle Ben demanded.

"Yep," Grandpa said proudly. "John Robert and me hatched and raised him unbeknowenst from an egg."

"He's real gentle. Honest,"

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John Robert said. "Just kinda young."

"That critter young? Why, he'd make four horses."

"Just a pup, though," Grandpa insisted. "Only two months old."

"Whut you been feeding him? A cow a day?"

"Nope. Been on hay and grass for three weeks."

"Is it gone?" Aunt Bess asked, sticking her head around the barn.

She saw Ozzie and started to withdraw. Uncle Ben motioned her on.

"Come here, Bess," he commanded. "We got us an honest-to-bob dragon."

It rained that night for the first time in several weeks, a slow monotonous drizzle that collected in puddles in the backyard and turned the tobacco field behind the house into a soupy morass of yellow mud. John Robert and Grandpa Riley spent most of the evening after supper in the barn, ministering to Ozzie. The dragon was weak and shaken and his scales were a lusterless yellow. The enigmatic sacs on his back were pulsing feebly and they had become quite tender to the touch. At length Grandpa Riley was satisfied that they could do no more and they left Ozzie in a troubled sleep.

The next morning Uncle Ben announced that he was not going to work. Instead, he planned to be gone for several days on a trip to New Orleans to see a man whom he knew. Aunt Bess packed him a lunch in a shoe box and, after a whispered conversation in a corner of the kitchen with occasional glances in John Robert's and Grandpa's direction, she accompanied Uncle Ben to the door. Shortly thereafter, John Robert heard the coughing of Uncle Ben's aged pick-up truck recede into the distance.

At just a few minutes before ten, Grandpa Riley called John Robert to the barn.

"Real amazin'," he said as he ushered John Robert into the back. John Robert could scarcely believe his eyes. Ozzie was stretched out lazily on a mound of straw, basking in the sunlight that streamed through a window. The great sacs during the night had ruptured, releasing two membranous masses which, under the drying effect of the sun, were assuming form and rigidity.

"He is one of the flyin' kind," John Robert said ecstatically. "I told you so."

"Sure looks like it," Grandpa admitted.

After some conversation, they decided to brave Aunt Bess's displeasure and lead Ozzie into the yard to take better advantage of the sun.

The wings were large and rustled like wet leather when Ozzie moved. Under the open sun, they lost their early

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transparency and quickly became opaque, sharing the brilliancy of his scale coloration. By evening he was already making tentative flying motions and John Robert marveled at the great muscles that flexed in Ozzie's chest at each increasingly certain movement.

The evening meal was a silent one, full of tenseness and excitement. Aunt Bess sat silently opposite John Robert, her face strained and thoughtful.

"Bess, you're looking mighty nervous," Grandpa remarked.

"Well, who wouldn't with that thing out in the barn," she said, biting her lip.

"Now, Bess. Ozzie ain't no 'thing.' Just like a pet."

"Well, won't be no bother after this week," she said.

John Robert looked up from his plate in alarm.

"Whut's that supposed to mean?" Grandpa demanded.

"I.. well, ycu might as well know," Aunt Bess said slowly. "Ben says a dragon'd be worth a right smart to some folks. He's gone to see a circus man he knows. Figures we'll get enough maybe even to buy a new car."

John Robert jumped to his feet. "You can't do that," he protested. "Ozzie ain't yourn."

"Now, boy," Aunt Bess said nervously, "you got to look at it the practical way. Whut you want with a dragon anyway?"

"John Robert's right," Grandpa said. "Ozzie ain't yourn to sell."

"You keep still, Pa," Aunt Bess's voice became hard and firm. "Life's too hard for your and John Robert's fancy notions. Somebody's got to think of the bread and butter in this house. Besides, Ben's the head of the house. He pays the bills and I couldn't change his mind.

"Even if I wanted to," she added after a moment.

And she began to talk of the many fine things they would buy after they had sold Ozzie to the circus.

John Robert had little to say the rest of the evening. Several times he found Aunt Bess looking at him with the strangest expression on her face and he wondered what she must be thinking behind those silent eyes. He had never known her to be so silent and withdrawn. Her expression, he realized, seemed almost apologetic as though she were somehow a little sorry for what she was doing. But, if she felt any regret, he knew that this would not interfere with the harsh demands of her life that said Ozzie must be sold.

When bedtime finally arrived, he lay awake, tossing on his mattress on the kitchen floor. He could hear the creak of Grandpa's couch in the living room and he knew that the old man must be hav-

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ing as much difficulty as he in getting to sleep.

Finally he dozed, but he awoke again in the early morning before the dawn when the bright yellow light of the full moon fell through the kitchen window and on his lids. He lay, thinking of Ozzie in the barn and the sudden exciting freedom of his new wings. He saw him imprisoned in a circus cage, iron bars shutting him from the vastness of the upper air and he felt sudden wetness on his lids.

A voice said, "Ps-s-t," and he sat up. Grandpa Riley was tip-toeing through the door, his shoes in his hands. He was fully dressed.

"Grandpa," John Robert demanded, "whut you doing up?"

"Not so loud," Grandpa shushed. "You know," he said in a low voice, "I been thinking."

"So have I," John Robert said. "About Ozzie. It ain't fair to him."

"John Robert," Grandpa said slowly, "there ain't really any place here for a young boy and an old man. Bess means well, but...Well, she don't see things the way you and me do."

"I know," John Robert said. "I like her and Uncle Ben, but she just don't seem to enjoy life any more."

"Maybe it's cause life's taken something out o' her," Grandpa said.

"You know," the old man said after a moment, "why don't you and me just take a little trip? They wouldn't miss us after a week or two."

John Robert jumped to his feet and began to pull on his clothes. They made their way silently through the moonlit yard to the barn. Ozzie awoke with a sleepy rumble and they led him outside.

"Think he can carry us both?" Grandpa asked.

"Course he can. Ozzie's the strongest dragon in creation."

They led him into the damp tobacco field.

"Needs a good long runway," Grandpa said. "Trifle muddy, though."

"Where'll we go?" John Robert laughed. "India? Araby?"

"Why, we'll go far away where no human's ever been before," Grandpa said. "He knows where."

They mounted, Grandpa in front, and held tightly to Ozzie's back. He sensed what was expected of him and eagerness poured into his body. The great muscles tensed, the clawed feet churned the muddy ground, found firm footing, and suddenly, with the smoothness of a skate slipping over ice, they soared up and up...over the tiny house and barn below, over the moon-flecked fields.

The wind whipped through John Robert's hair and he

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could barely breathe as he pressed himself forward against Grandpa Riley's thin frame.

"Egypt and Africa and Araby and all the far away places where nobody but him and his kind know!" John Robert yelled into the wind. "What will Aunt Bess and Uncle Ben say?"

"They'll never tell anyone. Why, they won't ever guess the truth," Grandpa gasped, his voice whipping back into John Robert's ear.

"Oh, they will. They will. They'll know," John Robert shouted. "Look."

He pointed down below as they banked sharply and swooped back over the tiny house below. Even at their speed they could see clearly the line of heavy tracks that led into the moon-bright tobacco field, led into its very center and then mysteriously came to an end.

And they could even see the tiny human figure that stood by the house, her head turned upward, her eyes shaded by a bare arm.

"Goodbye!" Grandpa Riley yelled.

"Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye," John Robert called into the cold wind.

And below the small figure waved uncertainly—regretfully.

Then the field, the house, the dappled landscape of stippled fields and tiny buildings dissolved in a misty kaleidoscope of brilliant yellow as the great winged beast completed his turn and fled swiftly toward the already brightening east.

NEXT MONTH—

ISAAC ASIMOV writes about the importance of THE UNRARE EARTHS

FREDRIC BROWN and MACK REYNOLDS describe a man's last hours in HAPPY ENDING

CIVILIAN SAUCER INTELLIGENCE reports on sightings in their column SHAPES IN THE SKY

We meet John Carter of Barsoom in ALLAN HOWARD'S IT'S A SMALL SOLAR SYSTEM

and

Conan returns in the most extraordinary adventure of them all, in CONAN THE VICTORIOUS, a new novel by BJORN NYBERG and L. SPRAGUE de CAMP

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small world

by WILLIAM F. NOLAN

He was running, running down the long tunnels, the shadows hunting him, claws clutching at him, nearer . . .

IN THE waiting windless dark, Lewis Stillman pressed into the building-front shadows along Wilshire Boulevard. Breathing softly, the automatic poised and ready in his hand, he advanced with animal stealth toward Western, gliding over the night-cool concrete, past ravaged clothing shops, drug and ten-cent stores, their windows shattered, their doors ajar and swinging. The city of Los Angeles, painted in cold moonlight, was an immense graveyard; the tall white tombstone buildings thrust up from the silent pavement, shadow-carved and lonely. Overturned metal corpses of trucks, busses and automobiles littered the streets.

He paused under the wide marquee of the FOX WILTERN. Above his head, rows of splintered display bulbs gaped—sharp glass teeth in wooden jaws. Lewis Stillman felt as though they might drop at any moment to pierce his body.

Four more blocks to cover. His destination: a small corner delicatessen four blocks south of Wilshire, on Western. Tonight he intended by-

What will happen when the alien ships strike Earth? And later? Who will survive? What will life be like in that latterday jungle? William F. Nolan, well known in SF circles on the West Coast, returns with this grim story of the days and the nights of Lewis Stillman—survivor. . .

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passing the larger stores like Safeway or Thriftimart, with their available supplies of exotic foods; a smaller grocery was far more likely to have what he needed. He was finding it more and more difficult to locate basic foodstuffs. In the big super-markets only the more exotic and highly spiced canned and bottled goods remained—and he was sick of caviar and oysters!

Crossing Western, he had almost reached the far curb when he saw some of *them*. He dropped immediately to his knees behind the rusting bulk of an Olds 88. The rear door on his side was open, and he cautiously eased himself into the back seat of the deserted car. Releasing the safety catch on the automatic, he peered through the cracked window at six or seven of them, as they moved toward him along the street. God! Had he been seen? He couldn't be sure. Perhaps they were aware of his position! He should have remained on the open street where he'd have a running chance. Perhaps, if his aim were true, he could kill most of them; but, even with its silencer, the gun would be heard and more of them would come. He dared not fire until he was certain they discovered him.

They came closer, their small small dark bodies crowding the walk, six of them, chattering, leaping, cruel mouths open, eyes glittering under the moon. Closer. The shrill pipings increased, rose in volume. Closer. Now he could make out their sharp teeth and matted hair. Only a few feet from the car... His hand was moist on the handle of the automatic; his heart thundered against his chest. Seconds away...

Now!

Lewis Stillman fell heavily back against the dusty seat-cushion, the gun loose in his trembling hand. They had passed by; they had missed him. Their thin pipings diminished, grew faint with distance.

The tomb silence of late night settled around him.

The delicatessen proved a real windfall. The shelves were relatively untouched and he had a wide choice of tinned goods. He found an empty cardboard box and hastily began to transfer the cans from the shelf nearest him.

A noise from behind—a padding, scraping sound.

Lewis Stillman whirled around, the automatic ready.

A huge mongrel dog faced him, growling deep in its throat, four legs braced for assault. The blunt ears were laid flat along the short-haired skull and a thin trickle of saliva seeped from the killing jaws. The beast's powerful chest-muscles were bunched for the spring when Stillman acted.

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The gun, he knew, was useless; the shots would be heard. Therefore, with the full strength of his left arm, he hurled a heavy can at the dog's head. The stunned animal staggered under the blow, legs bucking. Hurriedly, Stillman gathered his supplies and made his way back to the street.

How much longer can my luck hold? Lewis Stillman wondered, as he bolted the door. He placed the box of tinned goods on a wooden table and lit the tall lamp nearby. Its flickering orange glow illumined the narrow, low-ceilinged room as Stillman seated himself on one of three chairs facing the table.

Twice tonight, his mind told him, twice you've escaped them—and they could have seen you easily on both occasions if they had been watching for you. They don't know you're alive. But when they find out...

He forced his thoughts away from the scene in his mind away from the horror; quickly he stood up and began to unload the box, placing the cans on a long shelf along the far side of the room.

He began to think of women, of a girl named Joan, and of how much he had loved her...

The world of Lewis Stillman was damp and lightless; it was narrow and its cold stone walls pressed in upon him as he moved. He had been walking for several hours; sometimes he would run, because he knew his leg muscles must be kept strong, but he was walking now, following the thin yellow beam of his hooded lantern. He was searching.

Tonight, he thought, I might find another like myself. Surely, *someone* is down here; I'll find someone if I keep searching. I *must* find someone!

But he knew he would not. He knew he would find only chill emptiness ahead of him in the tunnels.

For three long years he had been searching for another man or woman down here in this world under the city. For three years he had prowled the seven hundred miles of storm drains which threaded their way under the skin of Los Angeles like the veins in a giant's body—and he had found nothing. *Nothing.*

Even now, after all the days and nights of search, he could not really accept the fact that he was alone, that he was the last man alive in a city of seven million, that all the others were dead.

He paused, resting his back against the cold stone. Some of them were moving over the street above his head. He listened to the sharp scuffling sounds on the pavement and swore bitterly.

"Damn you," said Lewis Stillman levelly. "Damn all of you!"

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Lewis Stillman was running down the long tunnels. Behind him a tide of midget shadows washed from wall to wall; high keening cries, doubled and tripled by echoes, rang in his ears. Claws reached for him; he felt panting breath, like hot smoke, on the back of his neck; his lungs were bursting, his entire body aflame.

He looked down at his fast-pumping legs, doing their job with pistoned precision. He listened to the sharp slap of his heels against the floor of the tunnel—and he thought: I might die at any moment, but my *legs* will escape! They will run on down the endless drains and never be caught. They move so fast while my heavy awkward upper-body rocks and sways above them, slowing them down, tiring them—making them angry. How my legs must hate me! I must be clever and humor them, beg them to take me along to safety. How well they run, how sleek and fine!

Then he felt himself coming apart. His legs were detaching themselves from his upper-body. He cried out in horror, flailing the air with his arms, beseeching them not to leave him behind. But the legs cruelly continued to unfasten themselves. In a cold surge of terror, Lewis Stillman felt himself tipping, falling toward the damp floor—while his legs raced on with a wild animal life of their own. He opened his mouth, high above the insane legs, and screamed.

Ending the nightmare.

He sat up stiffly in his cot, gasping, drenched in sweat. He drew in a long shuddering breath and reached for a cigarette. He lit it with a trembling hand.

The nightmares were getting worse. He realized that his mind was rebelling as he slept, spilling forth the bottled-up fears of the day during the night hours.

He thought once more about the beginning six years ago, about why he was still alive, the last of his kind. The alien ships had struck Earth suddenly, without warning. Their attack had been thorough and deadly. In a matter of hours the aliens had accomplished their clever mission—and the men and women of Earth were destroyed. A few survived, he was certain. He had never met any of them, but he was convinced they existed. Los Angeles was not the world, after all, and if *he* escaped so must have others around the globe. He'd been working alone in the drains when the alien ships appeared, finishing a special job for the construction company on B tunnel. He could still hear the weird sound of the mammoth ships and feel the intense heat of their passage.

Hunger had forced him out and overnight he became a curiosity. The last man alive.

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For three years he was not harmed. He worked with them, taught them many things, and tried to win their confidence. But, eventually, certain ones came to hate him, to be jealous of his relationship with the others. Luckily he had been able to escape to the drains. That was three years ago and now they had forgotten him.

His later excursions to the upper level of the city had been made under cover of darkness—and he never ventured out unless his food supply dwindled. Water was provided by rain during the wet-months—and by bottled liquids during the dry.

He had built his one-room structure directly to the side of an overhead grating—not close enough to risk their seeing it, but close enough for light to seep in during the sunlight hours. He missed the warm feel of open sun on his body almost as much as he missed the companionship of others, but he could not think of risking himself above the drains by day.

Sometimes he got insane thoughts. Sometimes, when the loneliness closed in like an immense fist and he could no longer stand the sound of his own voice, he would think of bringing one of them down with him, into the drains. One at a time, they could be handled. Then he'd remember their sharp savage eyes, their animal ferocity, and he would realize that the idea was impossible. If one of their kind disappeared, suddenly and without trace, others would certainly become suspicious, begin to search for him—and it would all be over.

Lewis Stillman settled back into his pillow, pulling the blankets tight about his body. He closed his eyes and tried not to listen to the distant screams, pipings and reedy cries filtering down from the street above his head.

Finally he slept.

He spent the afternoon with paper women. He lingered over the pages of some yellowed fashion magazines, looking at all the beautifully photographed models in their fine clothes. All slim and enchanting, these page-women, with their cool enticing eyes and perfect smiles, all grace and softness and glitter and swirled cloth. He touched their images with gentle fingers, stroking the tawny paper hair, as though, by some magic formula, he might imbue them with life. It was easy to imagine that these women had never really lived at all—that they were simply painted, in microscopic detail, by sly artists to give the illusion of photos. He didn't like to think about these women and how they died.

That evening Lewis Stillman watched the moon, round and high and yellow in the night sky, and he thought of his father, and of the long hikes through the moonlit

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Maine countryside, of hunting trips and warm campfires, of the Maine woods, rich and green in summer. He thought of his father's hopes for his future and the words of that tall, gray-haired figure came back to him.

"You'll be a fine doctor, Lewis. Study and work hard and you'll succeed. I know you will."

He remembered the long winter evenings of study at his father's great mahogany desk, pouring over medical books and journals, taking notes, sifting and re-sifting facts. He remembered one set of books in particular—Erickson's monumental three-volume text on surgery, richly bound and stamped in gold. He had always loved these books, above all others.

What had gone wrong along the way? Somehow, the dream had faded, the bright goal vanished and was lost. After a year of pre-med at the University of Southern Cal, he had given up medicine; he had become discouraged and quit college to take a laborer's job with a construction company. How ironic that this move should have saved his life! He'd wanted to work with his hands, to sweat and labor with the muscles of his body. He'd wanted to earn enough to marry Joan and then, later perhaps, he would have returned to finish his courses. It all seemed so far away now, his reason for quitting, for letting his father down.

Now, at this moment, an overwhelming desire gripped him, a desire to pour over Erickson's pages once again, to re-create, even for a brief moment. the comfort and happiness of his childhood.

He'd seen a duplicate set on the second floor of Pickwick's book store in Hollywood, in their used book department, and now he knew he must go after them, bring the books back with him to the drains. It was a dangerous and foolish desire, but he knew he would obey it. Despite the risk of death, he would go after the books tonight. *Tonight.*

One corner of Lewis Stillman's room was reserved for weapons. His prize, a Thompson submachine, had been procured from the Los Angeles police arsenal. Supplementing the Thompson were two semi-automatic rifles, a Luger, a Colt .45 and a .22 caliber Hornet pistol, equipped with a silencer. He always kept the smallest gun in a spring-clip holster beneath his armpit, but it was not his habit to carry any of the larger weapons with him into the city. On this night, however, things were different.

The drains ended two miles short of Hollywood—which means he would be forced to cover a long and particularly hazardous stretch of ground in order to reach

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the book store. He therefore decided to take along the .30 caliber Savage rifle in addition to the small hand weapon.

You're a fool, Lewis, he told himself, as he slid the oiled Savage from its leather case. Are the books important enough to risk your life? Yes, another part of him replied, they *are* that important. If you want a thing badly enough and the thing is worthwhile, then you must go after it. If fear holds you like a rat in the dark, then you are worse than a coward; you betray yourself and the civilization you represent. Go out and bring the books back.

Running in the chill night wind. Grass, now pavement now grass, beneath his feet. Ducking into shadows, moving stealthily past shops and theatres, rushing under the cold moon. Santa Monica Boulevard, then Highland, the Hollywood Boulevard, and finally—after an eternity of heartbeats—the book store.

Pickwick's.

Lewis Stillman, his rifle over one shoulder, the small automatic gleaming in his hand, edged silently into the store.

A paper battleground met his eyes.

In the filtered moonlight, a white blanket of broken-backed volumes spilled across the entire lower floor. Stillman shuddered; he could envision them, shrieking, scrabbling at the shelves, throwing books wildy across the room at one another. Screaming, ripping, destroying.

What of the other floors? *What of the medical section?*

He crossed to the stairs, spilled pages crackling like a fall of dry leaves under his step, and sprinted up the first short flight to the mezzanine. Similar chaos!

He hurried up to the second floor, stumbling, terribly afraid of what he might find. Reaching the top, his heart thudding, he squinted into the dimness.

The books were undisturbed. Apparently they had tired of their game before reaching these.

He slipped the rifle from his shoulder and placed it near the stairs. Dust lay thick all around him, powdering up and swirling, as he moved down the narrow aisles; a damp, leathery mustiness lived in the air, an odor of mold and neglect.

Lewis Stillman paused before a dim hand-lettered sign: MEDICAL SECTION. It was just as he had remembered it. Holstering the small automatic, he struck a match, shading the flame with a cupped hand as he moved it along the rows of faded titles. Carter... Davidson ... Enright... *Erickson.* He drew in his breath sharply. All three volumes, their gold stamping dust-dulled but readable,

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stood in tall and perfect order on the shelf.

In the darkness, Lewis Stillman carefully removed each volume, blowing it free of dust. At last all three books were clean and solid in his hands.

Well, you've done it. You've reached the books and now they belong to you.

He smiled, thinking of the moment when he would be able to sit down at the table with his treasure, and linger again and again over the wonderous pages.

He found an empty carton at the rear of the store and placed the books inside. Returning to the stairs, he shouldered the rifle and began his descent to the lower floor.

So far, he told himself, my luck is still holding.

But as Lewis Stillman's foot touched the final stair, his luck ran out.

The entire lower floor was alive with them!

Rustling like a mass of great insects, gliding toward him, eyes gleaming in the half-light, they converged upon the stairs. They had been waiting for him.

Now, suddenly, the books no longer mattered. Now only his life mattered and nothing else. He moved back against the hard wood of the stair-rail, the carton of books sliding from his hands. They had stopped at the foot of the stair; they were silent, looking up at him, the hate in their eyes.

If you can reach the street, Stillman told himself, then you've still got half a chance. That means you've got to get through them to the door. All right then, *move*.

Lewis Stillman squeezed the trigger of the automatic and three shots echoed through the silent store. Two of them fell under the bullets as Stillman rushed into their midst.

He felt sharp nails claw at his shirt and trousers, heard the cloth ripping away in their grasp. He kept firing the small automatic into them, and three more dropped under the hail of bullets, shrieking in pain and surprise. The others spilled back, screaming, from the door.

The gun was empty. He tossed it away, swinging the heavy Savage rifle free from his shoulder as he reached the street. The night air, crisp and cool in his lungs, gave him instant hope.

I can still make it, thought Stillman, as he leaped the curb and plunged across the pavement. If those shots weren't heard, then I've still got the edge. My legs are strong; I can outdistance them.

Luck, however, had failed him completely on this night. Near the intersection of Hollywood Boulevard and Highland, a fresh pack of them swarmed toward him over the street.

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He dropped to one knee and fired into their ranks, the Savage jerking in his hands. They scattered to either side.

He began to run steadily down the middle of Hollywood Boulevard, using the butt of the heavy rifle like a battering ram as they came at him. As he neared Highland, three of them darted directly into his path. Stillman fired. One doubled over, lurching crazily into a jagged plate-glass store front. Another clawed at him as he swept around the corner to Highland. He managed to shake free.

The street ahead of him was clear. Now his superior legpower would count heavily in his favor. Two miles. Could he make it back before others cut him off?

Running, re-loading, firing. Sweat soaking his shirt, rivering down his face, stinging his eyes. A mile covered. Half way to the drains. They had fallen back.

But more of them were coming, drawn by the rifle shots, pouring in from side streets, stores and houses.

His heart jarred in his body, his breath was ragged. How many of them around him? A hundred? Two hundred? More coming. God!

He bit down on his lower lip until the salt taste of blood was on his tongue. You can't make it, a voice inside him shouted, they'll have you in another block and you know it!

He fitted the rifle to his shoulder, adjusted his aim, and fired. The long rolling crack of the big weapon filled the night. Again and again he fired, the butt jerking into the flesh of his shoulder, the smell of powder in his nostrils.

It was no use. Too many of them.

Lewis Stillman knew that he was going to die.

Then rifle was empty at last, the final bullet had been fired. He had no place to run because they were all around him, in a slowly closing circle.

He looked at the ring of small cruel faces and he thought: The aliens did their job perfectly; they stopped Earth before she could reach the age of the rocket, before she could threaten planets beyond her own moon. What an immensely clever plan it had been! To destroy every human being on Earth above the age of six—and then to leave as quickly as they had come, allowing our civilization to continue on a primitive level, knowing that Earth's back had been broken, that her survivors would revert to savagery as they grew into adulthood.

Lewis Stillman dropped the empty rifle at his feet and threw out his hands. "Listen," he pleaded, "I'm really one of you. You'll *all* be like me soon. Please, *listen* to me."

But the circle tightened relentlessly around Lewis Stillman. He was screaming when the children closed in.

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no pets allowed

by M. A. CUMMINGS

He didn't know how he could have stood the four months there alone. She was company and one could talk to her . . .

I CAN'T tell anyone about it. In the first place, they'd never believe me. And, if they did, I'd probably be punished for having her. Because we aren't allowed to have pets of any kind.

It wouldn't have happened, if they hadn't sent me way out there to work. But, you see, there are so many things I can't do.

I remember the day the Chief of Vocation took me before the council.

"I've tried him on a dozen things," he reported. People always talk about me as if I can't understand what they mean. But I'm really not *that* dumb.

"There doesn't seem to be a thing he can do," the Chief went on. "Actually, his intelligence seems to be no greater than that which we believe our ancestors had, back in the twentieth century."

"As bad as that?" observed one of the council members. "You do have a problem."

"But we must find something for him to do," said another. "We can't have an idle person in the State. It's unthinkable."

"But what?" asked the

M. A. Cummings (Monette to her friends) returns with another hauntingly persuasive story of a Tomorrow that may not be as gleaming as we hope. Her recent story, THE WEIRDIES, apparently delighted some and startled others—and this in Los Angeles! What's happening there?

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Chief. "He's utterly incapable of running any of the machines. I've tried to teach him. The only things he can do, are already being done much better by robots."

There was a long silence, broken at last by one little, old council member.

"I have it," he cried. "The very thing. We'll make him guard of the Treasure."

"But there's no need of a guard. No one will touch the Treasure without permission. We haven't had a dishonest person in the State for more than three thousand years."

"That's it, exactly. There aren't any dishonest people, so there won't be anything for him to do. But we will have solved the problem of his idleness."

"It might be a solution," said the Chief. "At least, a temporary one. I suppose we will have to find something else later on. But this will give us time to look for something."

So I became guard of the Treasure. With a badge. And nothing to do—unless you count watching the Key. The gates were kept locked, just as they were in the old days, but the large Key hung beside them. Of course, no one wanted to bother carrying it around. It was too heavy. The only ones who ever used it, anyway, were members of the council. As the man said, we haven't had a dishonest person in the State for thousands of years. Even I know that much.

Of course, this left me with lots of time on my hands. That's how I happened to get her in the first place. I'd always wanted one, but pets were forbidden. Busy people didn't have time for them. So I knew I was breaking the Law. But I figured that no one would ever find out.

First I fixed a place for her, and made a brush screen, so that she couldn't be seen by anyone coming to the gates. Then, one night, I sneaked into the forest and got her.

It wasn't so lonely after that. Now I had something to talk to. She was small when I got her—it would be too dangerous to go near a full grown one—but she grew rapidly. That was because I caught small animals and brought them to her. Not having to depend on what she could catch, she grew almost twice as fast as usual, and was so sleek and pretty. Really, she was a pet to be proud of.

I don't know how I could have stood the four months there alone, if I hadn't her to talk to. I don't think she really understood me, but I pretended she did, and that helped.

Every three or four weeks, three of the council members came to take a part of the Treasure, or to add to it. Always three of them.

That's why I was so surprised one day, to see one man

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coming by himself. It was Gremm, the little old member, who had recommended that I be given this job. I was happy to see him, and we talked for a while, mostly about my work, and how I liked it. I almost told him about my pet, but I didn't, because he might be angry at me for breaking the Law.

Finally, he asked me to give him the Key.

"I've been sent to get something from the Treasure," he explained.

I was unhappy to displease him, but I said,

"I can't let you have it. There must be three members. You know that."

"Of course, I know it. But something came up suddenly, so they sent me alone. Now, let me have it."

I shook my head. That was the one order they had given me—never to give the Key to any one person who came alone.

Gremm became quite angry.

"You idiot," he shouted, "Why do you think I had you put out here. It was so I could get in there and help myself to the Treasure."

"But that would be dishonest. And there are no dishonest people in the State."

"For three thousand years. I know." His usually kind face had an ugly look I had never seen before. "But I'm going to get part of that Treasure. And it won't do you any good to report it, because no one is going to take the word of a fool like you, against a respected council member. They'll think you are the dishonest one. Now, give me that Key!"

It's a terrible thing to disobey a council member. But if I obeyed him, I would be disobeying all the others. And that would be worse.

"No!" I shouted.

He threw himself upon me. For his size and age, he was very strong—stronger, even, than I. I fought as hard as I could, but I knew I wouldn't be able to keep him away from the Key for very long. And if he took the Treasure, I would be blamed. The council would have to think a new punishment for dishonesty. Whatever it was, it would be terrible, indeed.

He drew back and rushed at me. Just as he hit me, my foot caught upon a root, and I fell. His rush carried him past me, and he crashed through the brush screen beside the path. I heard him scream twice, then there was silence.

I was bruised all over, but I managed to pull myself up and take away what was left of the screen. There was no sign of Gremm, but my beautiful pet was waving her pearl-green feelers as she always did in thanks for a good meal.

That's why I can't tell anyone what happened. No one would believe that Gremm would be dishonest. And I

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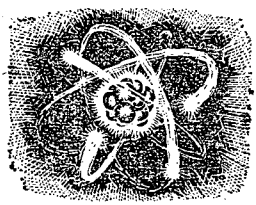
can't prove it, because she ate the proof.

Even if I did tell them, no one is going to believe that a fly-catcher plant—even a big one like mine—would actually be able to eat a man.

So they think that Gremm disappeared. And I'm still out here—with her. She's grown so much larger now, and more beautiful than ever.

But I hope she hasn't developed a taste for human flesh. Lately, when she stretches out her feelers, it seems that she's trying to reach me.



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universe in books

by STEFAN SANTESSON

Some recent books that you may have missed — and some comments on the contribution to the field of these novels.

SOME time ago we asked for comments on not so much the decline of science fiction (though decline there's been, in a sense), but the decline in the number of SF titles.

Dr. Raymond Wallace, of Montclair, N. J., felt that,— "Years ago science fiction used to be based on science, and often the whole story hung on the solution of some scientific problem. This has been deplored by many editors as mere gadgetry, and no doubt often it was, but at least it satisfied the readers who wanted science. Lately there has arisen the notion that science fiction should deal with the age-old human problems. I have no objection to that concept in itself, but I want some science with it. It does not make a science fiction story simply to place a war in an interplanetary setting, or to have a lover chase his sweetheart through time, when time-travel or interplanetary travel are merely *stated* and not demonstrated."

"I am not satisfied," continued Dr. Wallace, "when the good guy yanks out his blaster and shoots down the bad

There have been several reasons for the failure of this column to appear in recent months, the principal reason being that there were not too many books to be reported upon. The situation has improved, however, and UNIVERSE IN BOOKS will now appear with more regularity.

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guy; I'd kind of like to know what a blaster is. I don't require the author actually to invent a workable blaster; all he has to do is to give me some acceptable double-talk about its principles and operation. And I prefer the denoument not to hang on the mere fact that the bad guy gets shot, after the good guy finally traps him by management or good luck. I want the good guy to be *able* to shoot him only because his blaster is superior to the bad guy's disintegrator, which has also been explained to the same extent as the blaster."

Dr. Wallace also feels that there is a certain degree of illiteracy in Science Fiction.

What are your reactions?

Chad Oliver's THE WINDS OF TIME (Doubleday, $2.95) is a curiously uneven novel, when you consider the quality of his earlier work, so much so that you have the feeling that this is one of those novels that have been "edited" a shade too roughly, though this may be unfair. Despite somewhat inadequate characterizations, I suspect that the lonely men from Lortas—who are not quite the menaces that the blurb suggests—will be remembered for some time to come, remembered and imitated, perhaps because of this same inadequacy. They, and particularly Kolraq the Priest, come close to stepping out of the shadow mythology, that not quite respectable half-world to which we banish race memories and legends that cannot quite be measured and weighed and/or analyzed..... Wyik responds the way some of you would, Nlesine has the tired cynicism associated with his brittle equals today, and even Kolraq is disturbingly familiar—credibly so if you grant the possibility that at whatever stage of development "man" may find himself, the Aramis of the 17th Century will have his 20th Century equivalent, thinking the same way, responding to certain situations the same way, with the same fears and the same prejudices. Kolraq, by the way, is perhaps the most interesting of these lonely men—these lost men—and perhaps the author will tell us one day what happened to him and the other man who decided not to "sleep." Do read the novel, in other words, but be sure to skip the blurb which could be better!

Arthur C. Clarke's THE DEEP RANGE (Harcourt Brace, $3.95) is not exactly a "lively" novel. And it isn't even an "entertaining" novel, in the usual sense of the word. To this extent I disagree with the publishers.

It *is*, on the other hand, an important and challenging novel dealing with a period, a hundred years in the future, when the earth's population is fed principally from the sea, either on whale products or

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from the plankton farms.

It will be very easy for you to lose yourself in this world of Walter Franklin and Indra Langenburg, and the men and the women surrounding them, men and women dedicated to service. Walter Franklin, at the moment when he stares grimly into a world of midnight blue which the pale rays of the moon can do little to illumine, and Walter Franklin, years later, as he has to make a decision that can literally mean the end of his world, is a man you can understand and respect.

If you have not already done so, read Arthur Clarke's THE DEEP RANGE. Better still, buy the book. If the field is to survive, and trade publishing regain its interest in Science Fiction, more of you readers should get in the habit of buying books, particularly novels such as this which are distinguished contributions to our picture of a possible Tomorrow. Unqualifiedly recommended!

A. E. van Vogt's EMPIRE OF THE ATOM (Shasta, $3.) has been damned as bad writing by some critics and perhaps, if the novel is to be judged with completely puristic objectivity, this is not entirely unjustified.

In defence of both van Vogt and Shasta Publishers, one of the pioneers in modern science-fiction book publishing, it must be pointed out that this is an over-simplification and is to ignore the strong reader appeal of this story of the Linns who bring stability and order to a world recovering from a second Dark Age, and it is also to ignore the importance of this group of portraits of very human and credible people, cast against the background of a latterday Galactic Renaissance. The minor scientific flaws, and flaws they are and minor they are, do not detract from the suspense of the story and the provocativeness of the character of Clane, strange grandson of the Lord Leader of Linn.

A. van Vogt, in contrast to many we can think of, is a writer who has a broad panoramic approach to his subject.

Finally, here we have violence (or rather blind, dogged hate), plus basic English, plus Sex and deliberately exaggerated characterizations. While this obviously has commercial possibilities, *is* all this an admissible substitute for plotting in the classic sense of that much abused word? Alfred Bester's THE STARS MY DESTINATION (Signet, 35 cts) may or may not be the answer to this question which appears to interest some writers in the field, but there is no denying that this is a fast paced variation on this formula by the author of the much discussed THE DEMOLISHED MAN.

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out of the earth

by GEORGE EDRICH

Offences against the State meant elimination in the Black Passage. Death. And these people were to die!

First Awake, 2 Juli, 2207

WE HAVE walked much this awake and have stopped now for sleep. Last City is far behind us. Except for the two lamps we keep lighted to frighten away the Groles, there is nothing but blackness in the passage. The others are sleeping, and close beside me, Nina sleeps also. The sound of her breathing is all I have in the darkness.

Thoughts are not clear when the body is so tired, and the things that have happened seem unreal, like something dreamed. The arrest—the State Guards in their black uniforms—coming to our cubicle in the middle of the sleep hours—frightening Nina.

Ten awakes and sleeps of not knowing why. Then the trial—"Jon Farmer 8267, we show you a copy of *The Mushroom Farmers' Journal* of 21 January 2204. We call your attention to the article *Experiments With Red Lake Mushrooms in Rock Soil.* This article discusses with favor some policies of the Dictatorium of President Charles 27, an Enemy of the

This is not a story about the Dero! This is a story about a lost people — a persuasive and haunting story about a people, in a not too distant future, who have been forgotten by history. And it is the story of a little group of courageous people, determined to prove that Death was a Myth!

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State. Do you admit to writing this treason?"

You are not permitted to answer the Judges in a State trial because they know the answers to everything they ask you. But while they were talking together, I thought how different things became with time. I remembered the fine letter from the Secretary of Agriculture of the Dictatorium, and the two extra free days they had given me. But there was a new Dictatorium now. President Charles and General William had been lowered into Copper Pit and metallized. Now they were mounted in the Historical Museum in Central City. The others of the Dictatorium had been eliminated in Black Passage.

"—Jon Farmer 8267. You have written with favor about Enemies of the State. You are therefore yourself declared an Enemy of the State. By order of the Supreme Council of the Dictatorium of President Joseph 28, you are hereby sentenced to elimination in Black Passage."

Then Nina—"Nina Farmers wife 8267, you have mated with an Enemy of the State. By condescension of the Supreme Council of the Dictatorium of President Joseph 28, you are to be permitted to take an oath of renunciation and separation."

It is not too difficult for the heart to be strong when there is no decision for the mind to make. But what strength of heart Nina must have had then. I was terribly proud and terribly frightened when she walked over and stood with me.

"Please, Nina—" I said, but she shook her head, and her eyes told me I could say nothing more.

The Judges were angry. "Nina Farmerswife 8267, you are hereby declared an Enemy of the State. By order of....

There was no one else in the guard cubicle when they locked us in. When the May trials were over, five awakes later, there were seven of us. Doctor Dorn 394 was brought in the awake after we were. He had read the forbidden books in the Chambers of the Dead at the Historical Museum. He was almost thirty-five years old, and had been third assistant physician to the Supreme Council. This was a very strong office and only something as terrible as reading the forbidden books could have made him an Enemy of the State.

Ralf Fishcatcher and his wife, Mari, came from Red Lake. They were Enemies of the State because they had not reported all of the fish they had caught.

Except for Nina, the youngest one of us was Theodor Cook 3044. He was very frightened. He told how he had stolen mushroom bread from the Central City Ration

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Station where he worked, and how his wife had reported him so she wouldn't become an Enemy of the State also.

The last one to be brought in was Bruno Oreminer 2139. He had killed his foreman by hitting him in the head with a rock. He was a very big man, and very strong. But he talked very little and there was a cold and dangerous look in his eyes.

Early on the sixth awake, the guards came for us. The march was long, almost seven awakes. We passed through many cities—Big City, Power City, and Red Lake; then Iron City, Deep Pit, and Last City. There was only a ten lamp per mile passage from Big Pit to Last City. We passed few people. At Last City, we were taken to the State Guard Station and given small shoulder packs with the food, water, and lamps the law says we may have.

Out of Last City the passage was narrow and poorly lighted, only five lamps per mile. After a few miles the guards became silent, and then just up ahead we saw what looked like a solid iron wall. We had come to the gate to Black Passage.

One of the guards took a paper from his pocket and read it very quickly so that it was hard to understand most of the words. But every little while we could hear "Enemies of the State." When he finished reading, all three of the guards put their fingers in some notches in the gate and pulled with all their strength, and the gate slid into the side of the wall.

Black Passage was before us!

Mari Fishcatcher's wife gave a little scream, and Nina pressed up against me and held my arm tightly. Lying on the floor of the passage were many dead bones.

The guard who had read the paper said we must now go into Black Passage. For a long time no one moved. It is hard to be the first into a darkness where, no matter how far the eye searches, there is not the faintest light. Then Doctor Dorn struck the flint on his oil lamp and walked through the gate. With the light of his lamp ahead of us, the fear became less and we turned on our own lamps and followed after him.

The iron wall slid closed behind us. We could hear the steps of the guards as they walked back toward Last City. After awhile we couldn't hear them any longer

Bruno Oreminer tried to move the gate, but the iron was smooth on this side and nothing happened. Theodor Cook had put his face in his hands so he would not have to look at the dead bones, but he stepped on one, and when it cracked, he gave a little cry.

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Doctor Dorn started to walk down the passage. I took Nina's hand and we followed after him. It would do no good to stay there by the gate which would never again open for us. If we remained, we would just become dead bones like the rest. The others came along a little way behind.

After we had walked through the passage far enough away from the dead bones so we could not see them, Doctor Dorn stopped. He said we should rest awhile and eat a little of the food, and then we would talk.

Theodor Cook was the first one to ask him the question we were all thinking about. "When will we die?" he asked.

Doctor Dorn said he didn't know. The food and water we had been given was supposed to last for ten awakes and sleeps. If we were very, very careful, it might last for much longer. The oil would probably become used up first, and when there was no more light, then probably the Groles would get us.

Theodor asked whether the dead bones we had seen were people who had been killed by the Groles.

Doctor Dorn said he didn't know, but he didn't think so. When the Groles found someone, there were not supposed to be even dead bones left. No one had ever seen a Grole because they came only when there was no light at all.

Doctor Dorn said he was sorry he had to say such frightening things. But he wanted us to know and understand the worst before he told us things that might give us hope.

There was the smallest chance, Doctor Dorn said, that Black Passage might go to some other State where there was life, the way Copper Passage from Deep City went to the State of the Savages. Our hope was terribly small though, because even if the passage did go to such a place, it would probably be many more awakes and sleeps away than we had oil for; and also, the life there might be wild the way it was in the State of the Savages.

It is strange though how even a hope so small as to be almost nothing can give new strength to the heart.

Doctor Dorn talked more, telling us how we would have to learn to live with less and less light so that the oil would last as long as possible. In the beginning we would burn four lamps. Because the passage was not wide enough for more than two people to walk together, one of us would have to walk alone. But whoever walked alone would always carry one of the lighted lamps, and would never be first or last. When we became used to four lamps, we would turn one off and try walking

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with only three. After awhile another lamp would be turned off and only two lamps would be kept lighted, one at the beginning and one at the end of the column. During sleeps we would leave two lamps on. One would be enough to frighten away the Groles, but there was always the danger it might go out, so it was safer to use two.

Theodor asked wouldn't we get the Black Fear, with so little light.

Doctor Dorn said he didn't know. It was to prevent the Black Fear that we would turn off the lamps gradually instead of all at once. But anyway, it was better to get the Black Fear for a few hours than to use up all of the oil and have the Groles come.

When we started walking again, Doctor Dorn and Bruno went first, then Ralf and Mari, then Theodor. Nina and I walked last. It is frightening to be last with the blackness behind. Later, we will have a different position, and others will take our place.

We have walked for many hours. Now we have stopped for sleep and only the two guard lamps are burning. The light they make is hardly enough to write by. When I look up and see the terrible blackness in the passage before and behind us, a strange and awful feeling seems to form inside. This may be the beginning of Black Fear. I think it is better that I stop writing now. I want to hold Nina in my arms and sleep with the warmth of her life close to me.

Second Awake, 3 Juli 2207

Since last sleep, the hours have been slow and the walk long, but Black Passage remains the same. Doctor Dorn thinks there may be no change for many awakes and sleeps.

To walk in silence except for the sound of our steps becomes a fearsome thing, so we talk much. Doctor Dorn tells us interesting things that have happened while he was Physician to the Supreme Council. When he does this, we do not think so much of what may be ahead for us.

There is something of a strangeness about Bruno, the oreminer who killed his foreman. Although he rests when we rest, and sleeps when we sleep, the feeling comes that he is not with us. He walks always first with Doctor Dorn, and says nothing.

Sometimes Mari and Nina walk together and talk about woman things. Mari is twenty-two, three years older than Nina, and even though she has been married to Ralf for only five years, she has almost borne life once. Nina said it must be wonderful to bear life, and Doctor Dorn heard her and said she had the look of one who might bear life herself some day, perhaps even before she was

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twenty-five, Nina was very thrilled.

But it is strange to talk of a time so far ahead. The mind forgets sometimes there may be only a few awakes and sleeps left to all our lives.

One feels a great sorrow for Theodor. He does not have someone who is a part of him the way I have Nina and Ralf has Mari, and he does not have the strength of heart of Doctor Dorn or Bruno. Fear seems to hold his mind more than any of us. Many times Nina or Mari, or Ralf or I, walk beside him so he will not have to walk alone always. But when we speak to him he almost never answers.

Third Awake, 4 Juli 2207

Another sleep has come and our tiredness is greater. Doctor Dorn thinks we are about twenty-five miles from Lost City.

After an hour of the walk, we turned off one of the lamps, leaving only three on, and the blackness of the passage seemed to jump in toward us. It is like a live and evil thing, the blackness, running in fear from the light before us, yet following so closely behind. Sometimes I cannot help feeling that, like the Groles, it is just waiting for our last lamp to go out so it can rush in and kill us. In one thing we have been fortunate. Even with only three lamps lighted no one has had the Black Fear. But after this sleep we will burn only two lamps and again the blackness will move closer. It is not a pleasant thought to sleep with.

Fourth Awake, 5 Juli 2207

Except for the greater darkness because of only two lamps, all is the same. It is strange not to have the City Signals to tell us when to sleep and when to awake. Because we have only our tiredness to measure awakes and sleeps, I am no longer sure the date I write above is the right one.

We do not talk as much now. All of our strength must be used for walking.

Fifth Awake, 6 Juli 2207

One of the lamps went out while we were walking, this awake. Although we were able to light it again in a few seconds, we could not help thinking how the Groles might have come if the other lamp hadn't been burning.

Doctor Dorn says our tiredness is so great because we eat so little of the food. It is very hard to be careful when one remains so hungry; yet not knowing how many days are before us in Black Passage makes the mind fearful and the will strong.

Seventh Awake, 8 Juli 2207

This awake, Theodor had the Black Fear. We had

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hold one of the lamps in front of his eyes for more than an hour before he was able to stop trembling. Then it was almost another hour before he was able to go on.

Eleventh Awake, 12 Juli 2207

Sleep follows sleep and nothing changes. Sometimes I feel that we have not moved at all, that we are still just outside Last City. Yet Doctor Dorn says we have come almost one hundred miles.

Twelfth Awake, 13 Juli 2207

Just before this sleep we emptied our shoulder packs to see how much food and water we have used. Most of us have used about one-fourth of what we have been given. Doctor Dorn says this is not bad, but we must learn to use even less. Theodor has much more food left than any of us. This is not surprising, because during rests he eats almost nothing.

It is the little oil we have left that worries Doctor Dorn. He does not believe there will be enough for even ten more awakes and sleeps. We would use less oil if we burned only one lamp, but it would be a terrible chance. We remember how a lamp went out several awakes ago.

Fourteenth Awake, 15 Juli 2207

There was much trouble during our last sleep. Soon after sleep had come, a terrible cry awoke us again. My mind first had the thought that the lamps had gone out and the Groles had come. But both lamps were still burning, and near one of them, we could see Bruno and Theodor struggling together on the floor of the passage. Bruno's hands were around Theodor's throat, and Theodor was no longer able to make any sounds. Bruno is terribly strong, and Ralf and I and Doctor Dorn had to use all of our own strength to force his hands away. Doctor Dorn asked Bruno why he had done this, and Bruno pointed to where his shoulder pack was lying open, and said, "He was stealing." These were the only words he had said for a long time. When Theodor stopped choking and was able to speak again, Doctor Dorn asked him if what Bruno had said was true. Theodor said no, and Doctor Dorn said he should look directly into his eyes and answer again. Theodor said he was sleepy and his throat hurt and he didn't want to talk any more. Doctor Dorn gave a big sigh, and said he understood. He said Theodor must promise never to steal again. If he didn't promise, or if he broke his promise, then perhaps the next time Bruno tried to kill him, we might not hear him in time. Theodor became very frightened, and said all right, he promised.

When we were going back

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to sleep, Nina told me she had wondered why Theodor slept each time near someone else. He had probably thought by taking a little from each one of us, his stealing would not be noticed.

Seventeenth Awake, 18 Juli 2207

The awakes and sleeps pass again and everything is as it was, except that our food and oil becomes less, and our tiredness g r e a t e r. Several times during our walk we have found a little water in the passage. How wonderful it would be if we could so easily find more food and oil.

Although Bruno shows no sign that he wants to hurt Theodor again, Theodor is still terribly frightened of him, and stays as far from him as possible. Before each sleep, Doctor Dorn makes Theodor open his shoulder pack and show him the food he has left. His food is being used up as fast as ours is now.

Eighteenth Awake, 19 Juli 2207

Eighteen awakes and sleeps we have walked in Black Passage. To the mind, it is forever.

The passage has begun to climb a little. This is not a good thing.

Nineteenth Awake, 20 Juli 2207

I write this during rest.

We have come to a Dead City. No lamps are lighted in the dark street passages and all the cubicles are empty. We have found many other passages going out of the City, and we must now decide which is the best to try. I do not think this will be difficult. One of the passages seems newer than any of the others, much newer and larger than Black P a s s a g e t h r o u g h which we have walked for so long. There are lamps in this passage, and even though they are not lighted, they would not have been put there unless the passage went to some other City. Although this other city may be dead also, hope is now a little greater. Doctor Dorn calls this passage Hope Passage. Another thing that adds to hope is the way the passage goes down so steeply.

Hope Passage was found many hours ago, sleep time has now come, and yet a decision has not been made. Much of this is because of Nina. Although she has spoken very little, the things she has said have made Doctor Dorn behave very strangely.

When he asked each of us if we thought Hope Passage would be the best one to follow, everyone but Nina said yes right away. Even Bruno nodded. But when he asked Nina, she did not answer so quickly. Then she said if we all thought Hope Passage was the best, it was probably so.

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But Doctor Dorn was not satisfied. Did she not think so herself, he asked. Was there something about Hope Passage she did not like? Was there some other passage she thought might be better?

I could feel Nina's fingers tighten on my arm the way they did whenever she became very frightened or worried or disturbed. It was not something her mind thought, she said. It was just a feeling she had which she couldn't understand or explain.

Doctor Dorn's voice became very gentle. He said Nina shouldn't try to understand or explain her feeling. But would she try to describe what it was like, even a little.

Nina looked at me very troubled and I put my arm around her shoulders, and said she didn't have to answer if she didn't want to. But then she took a little breath and said in a very low voice that as far back as she could remember, even when she was a tiny girl, she always had a good feeling when she was going up and a bad feeling when she was going down. It was a strange way to be, she knew, and she had never told anyone before. But that was why she did not like Hope Passage, which went down so fast. The passage she had liked best was the one near the old statue. The way it went up gave her a good feeling.

Doctor Dorn asked didn't she know the passage by the statue was the oldest one we had found, and therefore it s h o u l d have the smallest chance of going to a live city.

Nina said she knew, and her mind understood everything Doctor Dorn said. But the things her mind knew and understood were not able to change the way she felt. She said she was sorry she had made us all lose so much time. She would not talk about it any more.

Doctor Dorn asked Nina would she please answer just one more question. Did she have this good feeling while we were walking up the little climb near the end of Black Passage.

Nina nodded her head yes, and Doctor Dorn said it was very interesting. Then in a different voice, he said that Hope Passage was our best chance of finding life, and after this sleep we would continue our walk there.

Twentieth Awake, 21 Juli 2207

A few hours ago we said goodbye to Ralf and Mari and Bruno, and watched them start down Hope Passage. I think they may find life again soon.

Even now, I do not understand clearly why we are not with them; why we are climbing in this old rough passage which rises so steeply we

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must stop every little while to rest.

Many thoughts must have come to Doctor Dorn during our last sleep, because when we awoke he was different from any way he had been before. For a little while, he just walked up and back rubbing his chin as if he were thinking very hard. Then all of a sudden he stopped and came over to Nina. He asked Nina whether if we were not here, if she had to decide only for herself, knowing all he had told her, would she still take the old passage?

Nina said yes, she would. Doctor Dorn sat down. He said he was going to say strong words. He was going to tell us some of the things he had read in the Forbidden Books.

For thousands of years Man had first lived on Earth Surface, the books said. But then great wars had come and Man had studied hard and learned ways to kill each other millions at a time. But some of the men who did not want to die had dug deep into the earth to live. Everyone in the earth, the books said, came from these first men from Earth Surface.

Doctor Dorn stopped to let us think about what he had told us. *Earth Surface*—nothing above but nothing—and nothing beyond nothing—the thought is more than the mind can hold. That men could have lived on such a place is too much to be believed

There were some things written in the Forbidden Books that could not be true, Doctor Dorn said, like the plants called trees that grew to be many times taller than a man; or lakes called oceans that were larger than a thousand Red Lakes together. But even though these and some other things the books said were not possible, there was something about the story of men living on Earth Surface that made him wonder. All sleep he had not slept, but had thought how the old passage we had found near the statue might be one of the surface passages the books told about. He could not imagine any City in the Earth building a passage so steep and so rough.

Doctor Dorn stopped talking for a moment, and he looked at me. He seemed very excited. "Jon," he said, "my own feeling now is to take Surface Passage. I cannot do this alone with one lamp. You know how Nina feels. Will you and Nina come with me?"

My thoughts must have been like those of the lost-mind men in the hospital at Central City. Even now I do not know why I said we would. Maybe it was because of the way Nina's eyes shone when Doctor Dorn talked about Earth Surface. Nina is a wonderful girl and I love

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her very much, but sometimes I think I do not understand her completely.

Ralf and Mari talked together for a long time. Then Ralf told Doctor Dorn he thought Hope Passage was the best chance for finding life. They would not come with us.

Doctor Dorn said he understood. He was sorry we had to separate now, but each must do what was in his own thoughts and heart. Then he asked Bruno if he was coming with us, and Bruno shook his head no, and did not say anything.

Theodor thought for even a longer time than Ralf and Mari. He kept biting the nails on his fingers and every little while his eyes would look at Bruno. I knew he was afraid to come with us; but also he was afraid to be alone with Bruno with only Ralf to help him if anything happened. Finally, in a very low voice, he said he would come with us.

Doctor Dorn said fine, now there was one more thing we must do before we started. We must take the oil from one of the lamps and put it in the other six lamps so there would be the same amount in each one. Then each group would take three lamps.

Theodor said this was not fair. There were four of us so we should have four lamps. Doctor Dorn said four people needed no more light than three people.

It was very sad when we had to separate. Mari and Nina cried a little. For a long time after we found Surface Passage and were climbing in it, no one said anything. Perhaps after next sleep, our sadness may be less.

Twenty-First Awake, 22 Juli 2207

The passage is still climbing and we rest often. I write a little during some of our rests.

There is very little oil left. Doctor Dorn says we must take a dangerous chance. No lamp has gone out for a long time. If we burn only one lamp, we can have light for almost four more awakes and sleeps. If this is really a Surface Passage, and if what is written in the forbidden books is true, this time may be enough for us to reach Earth Surface.

We have been burning only one lamp since our last rest. How bright does the light from the two lamps seem now. Nina says she feels she can reach out and touch the blackness.

Theodor is very frightened. Over and over he says we must go back and take the other passage, that if we go on we shall all be dead bones. I think Doctor Dorn would become angry if he did not

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understand how frightened Theodor is.

During rest, Theodor spoke words that made Nina feel very sad. He said it was because of her that we would all die. I became very angry, and told him if he said anything like that again, I would finish what Bruno had started. He knows I would not do this, but now he talks very little.

Twenty-Second Awake, 23 Juli 2207

We walk up Surface Passage still, but there is a difference. Before last sleep there was much hope in our hearts. Now our hope is almost nothing.

It was Nina who knew first. She brought me out of sleep, shaking my shoulder and saying my name, until my mind was awake enough to understand.

Theodor was gone!

He had left us the one lamp that was burning. The other two lamps he had taken; and all of our food and water. But our hunger may never become too great. With one lamp, there will be light until only a few hours after next sleep.

Doctor Dorn blames himself. He says he should have been able to tell that Theodor might do something like this. But Doctor Dorn feels the same tiredness that is in us all, making our thoughts like shadows.

Sleep time has come, but we do not stop. We will walk on and rest when we must. When the end of life is so near, the will finds strength.

Twenty-Third Awake, 24 Juli 2207

We have walked through sleep and we have slept while we walked. The rise is steeper. Our oil lamp is still burning and our shadows fall behind us into the blackness. There will be light for perhaps ten more hours.

There is a dampness now in the passage, like that of the passage to Red Lake. Our tiredness is so great we become afraid sometimes that after one of our rests we may not be able to go on. I am worried about Nina. She says nothing, but I think for a long while now she has been walking on heart strength alone. We have seven hours of light before us.

The passage has ended. For a moment the thought came that we were on Earth Surface. But Doctor Dorn says we are in a great cavern, larger even than the Cavern of Red Lake. Our one light is as nothing in this great blackness, and we walk close to the wall so we will not become lost. In some places the walls are like glass as if from a very great heat. There are more passages in the sides of this cavern than the mind can imagine. But after this rest there is nothing else we can do but try one of them.

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For five hours we have been lost in passages that curve and turn and join with each other as madly as if they were made by lost-mind men. Now we have found our way back to the Great Cavern. We shall stay here the two hours longer our light and lives will last.

It is easier now that our hope is nothing.

We can rest and wait, and even our fear becomes less in our tiredness.

The time has gone slowly, but the light from the lamp is becoming less now. In a few seconds it will go out, and the Groles will come, and our lives will be over. Perhaps for an instant before we die, we shall know what the Groles are; or perhaps it happens so quickly we will never know anything. This may be the better way. Nina trembles in my arms.

We wait in the blackness. The lamp has been out for many minutes but the Groles have not come.

How can this be? Can the mind conceive that there are no such things as Groles, that, like so many other things, they are only a lie of the State?

These last words I write now.

The Groles are coming! We can hear their murmuring sounds through the passages. We say goodbye to each other.

They are very close now— very—

ALVAREZ COUNTY DAILY RECORD

Inhabitants of Earth's Interior Come to Alvarez

by Franklin Williams,
Staff Writer

Alvarez, May 9, 2204.— An almost unbelievable event of the greatest significance not only to Alvarez, or the United States of the Western Hemisphere, but to the entire world, occurred in our Alvarez County yesterday. Visitors on the early morning tour through Alvarez Caverns, came upon an astonishing spectacle. Two men and a young girl of indescribable strangeness of manner and dress were seated on the floor of Atom Cave. All were in the last stages of exhaustion and exposure, and even the little light from the electric hand lamps seemed to blind them. Fortunately, in the tour was Dr. and Mrs. Ferguson of New Washington, and Dr. Ferguson, appraising himself rapidly of the situation, led the trio out of the Caverns and drove them to Alvarez Hospital. Dr. Ferguson says they seemed completely dazed and unable to speak. They came with him without resistance.

After an examination by Dr. Stutfeldt of Alvarez Hospital which completely confirmed Dr. Ferguson's earlier diagnosis, the strange visitors were put in a darkened room,

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in which they surprisingly had no difficulty seeing, and were given simple nourishment.

Late in the evening, after they had slept and rested for many hours, they were questioned. In the presence of a distinguished group which included Mayor Whitehead, Professor Loraine Johnson (a very charming young lady) of the Alvarez University, J. W. Wilson, Chairman of the Alvarez Chamber of Commerce, and your reporter, they told an amazing, but according to Professor Johnson, entirely credible story.

Speaking slowly with an accent strongly reminiscent of twenty-first century North American, but with somewhat peculiar grammatical formations, the oldest of the group told of their having walked for many weeks from their State deep within the Earth.

Undoubtedly, they will have much more of interest to tell, but Dr. Stutfeldt refused to let them talk for more than a few minutes. He says it will be many weeks before they will regain their strength, and much longer before they will be able to adjust to the tremendous differences between their old life and life on the surface of the earth. It is entirely possible, Dr. Stutfeldt says, that they may never be able to make this adjustment.

An interesting sidelight of their within-the-earth civilization is that, although they apparently have the same calendar system as ours, in some way their time seems to have gotten out of step. According to their reckoning it is now some three years and two months later than it is.

NEW WASHINGTON SUN
What's New Under the Sun
by Dick Richard

The (very) little furor that has been caused by the recent report from Alvarez County of the arrival of visitors from inside the earth shows signs of abating completely. Very likely it is just a case of poor timing, (three reports of flying saucers and one of Saturnian birdmen in less than a month has pretty well saturated the gullibility market). But perhaps it is just as well. Not that we are skeptical by nature, but we cannot help wondering at the somewhat amazing coincidence of the Alvarez report being issued just two weeks before the start of the Alvarez County Festival.

UNITED STATES OF THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE
DEPARTMENT OF STATE
DIVISION OF INVESTIGATION

Report on Supernatural Phenomena: File No. B5138
Subject: Subterranean Inhabitants.
Reference: Alvarez County Record, News Item of May 9, 2204, et al. (See File).

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On January 3, 2206, in performance of the subject investigation, a visit was made to the Alvarez Hospital at Alvarez, Alvarez County. Dr. Ernest Stutfeldt was contacted, and upon being questioned, expressed surprise and some annoyance that an investigation was being conducted, in his words, "so damned long after everything was over". It was pointed out to Dr. Stutfeldt that qualified investigative personnel was limited, that these matters had to be taken in their proper turn, and that a year and a half interval for an investigation of this nature was not considered excessive. The information was then elicited from Dr. Stutfeldt that the "earth visitors" were no longer patients at the hospital, that two of them, a Mr. and Mrs. Jon Farmer, were living on their farm about ten miles out of Alvarez, and that the third, a Dr. Dorn Smith, was studying medicine at Alvarez University.

Transportation to the university was thereupon obtained, and after considerable time and difficulty, Dr. Dorn Smith was located. When asked for some proof of his subterranean origin, the doctor was unable to provide same. His descriptions of the life and government of his claimed underground "State" could with a little imagination, have been derived from any textbook on the absolute governments of the twenty-first century.

A certain measure of authenticity was temporarily ascribed to Dr. Dorn Smith's statements, when these were termed as "entirely credible" by Professor Lorraine Johnson of the university. However, the explanation for Professor Johnson's corroboration became obvious when it was learned that the professor and Dr. Dorn Smith were engaged to be married.

Although it was apparent by this time that the claims made by the subject investigatees had no information in fact, in order to insure a completely comprehensive inquiry, a visit was made to the Farmers' domicile. Obviously alerted by a phonovision from Dr. Dorn Smith, Mr. and Mrs. Farmer were cordial, but no more informative than their three months old baby daughter. The inquiry was then terminated.

A verbatim account of all questions and answers pertaining to the above investigation is affixed hereto.

Therefore, and in consequence of this inquiry, it is recommended that the subject supernatural phenomenon be classified as "Not Verified", and that the file be closed.

Respectfully submitted,
Clarence B. Pendergast,
Special Investigator of
Supernatural Phenomena
DEPARTMENT OF STATE
January 5, 2206.

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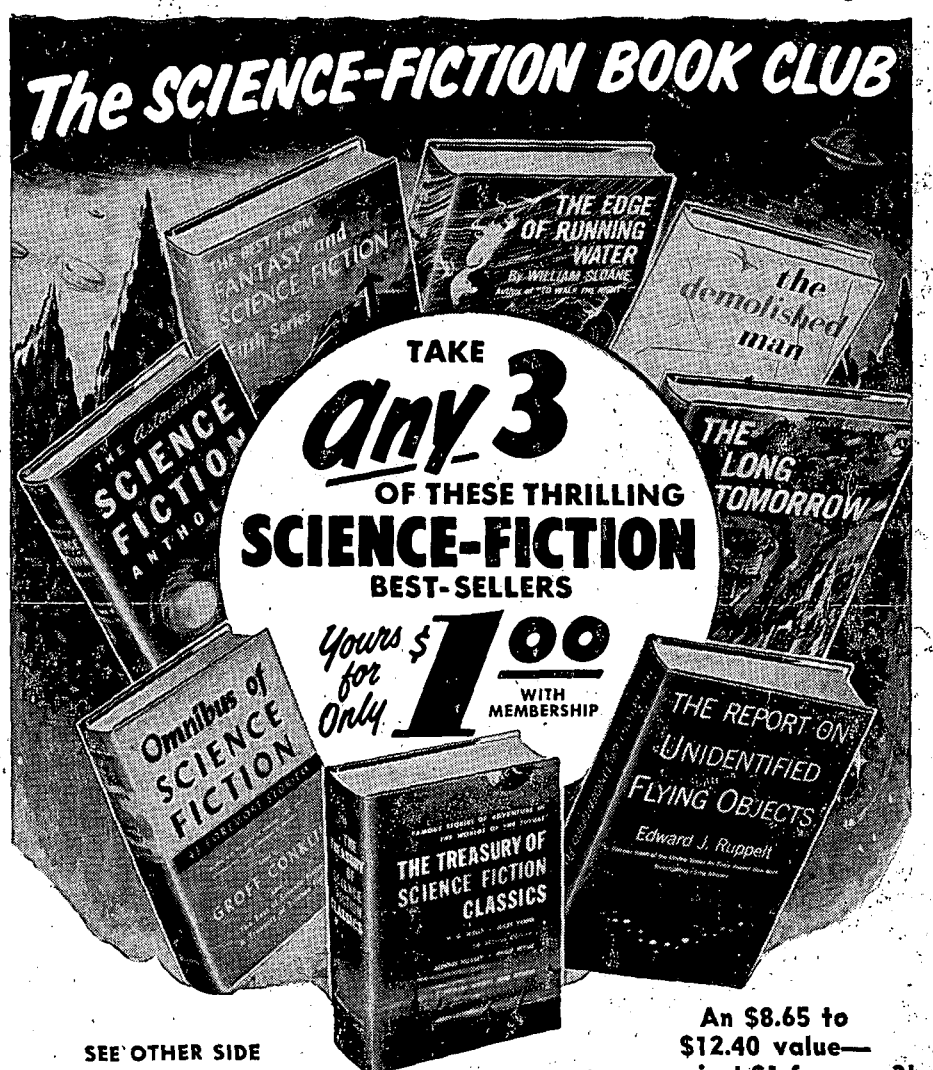

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